

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: RE-IMAGINING SECONDARY EDUCATION: VOICES FROM
SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL
SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Global discourse on secondary education and vocational skills development offers a narrative which emphasizes increased use of standardized testing; a focus on science, technology, business knowledge, and vocational skills development; and identifies expansion of access to secondary and tertiary education as a solution to poverty, inequality, and unemployment. In South Africa, academic and vocational secondary education is largely shaped by this discourse, which is grounded in the assumptions of human capital theory and privileges the perpetuation of an elite model of secondary education. Apartheid-era practices of racial segregation and racial capitalism, while legally dismantled, still have a significant influence on the political economy of modern day South Africa. This influence includes the distribution of power, resources, and opportunities articulated through South Africa's public education system.

This study draws on critical social theory and political economy to understand existing constructions of academic and vocational secondary education in South Africa, including how these constructions dialectically relate education to work and society. The purpose of this study is to allow grassroots voices, teachers and learners at two schools in marginalized communities in South Africa, to “talk back to discourse” about the purpose of secondary education. How do learners and teachers define purpose? Many see secondary school as a place for students to learn about themselves and education as a means to realizing their dreams, even if their dreams are only, as yet, partially formed. This study offers a humanistic counter-narrative to the dominant discourse by sharing the dreams and holistic development interests of learners and the hopes and frustrations of teachers as they learn and work within an inhumane and narrow construction of education, work, and society.

**RE-IMAGINING SECONDARY EDUCATION: VOICES FROM
SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL SECONDARY
EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2015

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Preface: Education, treadmill or coral reef

The treadmill has two settings: faster and higher. For historically marginalized learners, who have limited support at home and poor foundational education, secondary education is often a matter of catching up. “Catching up” requires a narrowing of focus: taking core subjects thought to be competitive for university access, spending long amounts of time in the classroom going over and memorizing factual knowledge, and taking practice exams over and over again to “get right” for semester exams and final exams. Every day, learners go to the “measurement desert of performance based education” and get on the treadmill to see if they can learn to run faster or at a steeper incline (Jansen & Blank, 2014, p.114).

What if, instead, we envisioned education as a coral reef: an authentic, multi-level environment open to exploration. Learners’ abilities and interests influence the learning agenda (today is it predator-prey relationships or the poetry of light?), learners are led by knowledgeable guides (Have you seen this? How can we explain that?), are shown how different phenomena are interrelated (Why is this coral dead? How does this relate to increased use of fertilizers on industrial farms?), and can look to horizons offering opportunities for further exploration (Do I see a container ship in the distance? What are the people on the beach harvesting? Why?)

Why do we put learners on a treadmill when we live on a coral reef? Because we want learners to succeed in life and the treadmill appears the surest path to success. We want to measure success and the treadmill offers straightforward inarguable measures. We know, clearly, what we need to do to improve on the treadmill. We value meritocracy and the treadmill shows us who has more merit than others. The treadmill is great, if we want to run, alone, in our garage, and sweat for a duration of time. At the end of the day, those on the treadmill will be better at Biology, but they won’t know why it matters.

Acknowledgments

In the process of designing and implementing this research, I have benefited from the support, wisdom, patience, time, knowledge, and encouragement of many people. I want to thank a few of them here. First, I am deeply indebted to learners, students, teachers, lecturers, and other adults who agreed to participate in this research. Without the energetic engagement of youth and staff at an anonymous secondary school and an anonymous FET College, this research would not have been possible.

I am fortunate to be associated with the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) at the University of Johannesburg and the Emerging Voices 2 (EV2) project. I am thankful to Salim Vally, the CERT Director, and to each of my CERT and EV2 colleagues. I deeply believe in the mission and work of CERT and the Education Policy Consortium (EPC). I've worked, learned, and laughed with several CERT, EV2, and EPC colleagues over the past year and am truly appreciative of our time together. May it continue into 2015.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Carol Anne Spreen and Professor Steven Klees. Carol Anne, you played a crucial role in helping me find a home at CERT. Over the past two years, I have developed a great admiration for your work and research on education in South Africa. Thank you for guiding me to CERT, and for providing such a robust body of research from which to draw. Steve, I am inspired by your intellectual courage, your many contributions to the field of comparative education, and your commitment to your students. As my advisor, you were never more than an email away: a reassuring presence during the often isolating experience of research and writing.

I am also grateful to have been able to meet, learn from, and engage with education faculty at the University of Maryland, College Park and beyond: Professor Jim Williams, you never fail to provoke my thinking, thank you; Professor Jing Lin, your work has enhanced my appreciation of the essential role culture, values, and beliefs play in education; Professor Linda Valli, you have been an invaluable guide to me as I have journeyed down the path of interpretative and critical research methods. I offer a sincere and heartfelt thank you to my family and friends. And to my wife, words cannot express my deep appreciation and thanks for your presence in my life.

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Abbreviations

CAPS	Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
FET	Further Education and Training
NATED	National Assembly Training and Education Department (courses)
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NCV	National Certificate, Vocational
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Chapter 1: Introduction

My research asks a simple question: What is the purpose of secondary education? I query a particular audience, teachers, students and high school dropouts; living in a particular context, schools located in townships in the province of Gauteng, South Africa; during a particular historical period, twenty years into South Africa's new democracy. I then compare their perspectives and experiences with global and national discourses on secondary education and skills development.

I am making this inquiry because I am interested in interrogating two global phenomena which intimately affect the lives of teachers and learners. The first phenomenon is the influence of dominant policy discourses on social constructions of secondary education. The dominant narrative on education is shaped by priorities in economics: the quest for growth, the fears (or lingering effects) of economic crises and the ills of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Education and skills development, defined by market needs, is often promoted as a solution to the problems of economics and society. What do teachers and learners in marginalized communities have to say about this? Do they see other purposes for education? The second phenomenon is the tension between *elite* and *democratic* conceptualizations of and practices in secondary education. In most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, secondary schools are purposed to provide academic preparation for university education and are organized around helping learners pass high stakes leaving exams (which mediate entry into tertiary education). What tensions exist in a system which, while striving to provide secondary education “for all,” remains shaped by elite-forming selection mechanisms and significantly influenced by elite constructions of knowledge? In many countries, including South Africa, these two phenomena operate concurrently. Human capital formation, through education and skills development (especially in STEM fields) is seen as a solution to national economic challenges. Increased testing and assessment, operating in tandem with narrowly defined curriculum and instructional expectations, is seen as a solution to addressing “abysmal” quality.

Why South Africa?

I chose to conduct this research in South Africa for two reasons. *First, the experience of South Africa starkly demonstrates the insufficiency of supply-side, access-first education policies in addressing the challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment.* While some progress has been made in the two decades following South Africa's transition to democracy, high levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment persist. South Africa is classified as an upper middle income country, yet nearly half of the population, 23 million people, lives below the upper-bound poverty line.¹ Twenty-percent of the South African population remains below the food poverty line. This means that ten million people in South Africa are food insecure. With a Gini coefficient estimated to be greater than 0.60, South Africa continues to have one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world (Stats SA, 2014). In addition to persistent poverty and inequality, South Africa also has one of the highest rates of unemployment (35%) and one of the highest rates of youth unemployment (estimated at over 50%) globally (Oosthuizen & Cassim, 2014; Stats SA, 2014; World Bank, 2014).² Since 1994, unemployment in South Africa, broadly measured, has remained stubbornly high. In 1994 and 2014, unemployment, broadly measured, was unchanged, at 35%. Unemployment figures vary by "race." In 2014, 40% of black South Africans were unemployed, compared to 28% of coloured South Africans, 18% of Indian/Asian South Africans, and 8% of white South Africans.³ Notably, 2014 unemployment figures, disaggregated by "race" are largely similar to 1994 figures (Stats SA, 2014). While access to tertiary education for black South Africans has more than doubled over the past two decades, so too has the unemployment rate for black South African tertiary graduates – from 8% in 1994 to 19% in 2014 (Stats SA, 2014). Contrary to policy goals and popular

¹ According to a study by Statistics South Africa, the upper-bound poverty line is Rand 620 per capita per month (in 2011 prices). This figure translates to a line of \$90 per person per month (Stats SA, 2014).

² There are varied ways of measuring this data. Statistics South Africa states that the broad measure of unemployment is 35% in 2014. Statistics South Africa indicates that youth unemployment stands at just under 40% as of 2014, however other sources (e.g., Oosthuizen & Cassim, 2014; World Bank, 2014), which consider youth unemployment more broadly argue that youth unemployment is greater than 50%.

³ Note that collection and presentation of data is often disaggregated with respect to the racial categories used during the apartheid era: black (African), coloured (mixed race), Indian and white (of European descent). While the term "colored" has a pejorative meaning in the United States, the government of South Africa continues to use the term "coloured" to identify a particular "racial category" used during apartheid and track progress toward equity goals in the new democracy.

expectations: increased access to education has not significantly changed the high incidence of poverty, inequality, and unemployment in South Africa.

My second reason for choosing to conduct this research in South Africa is as follows: *the experience of South Africa demonstrates how a broad and inclusive vision for social transformation (through education) can be progressively undermined if broader social issues remain unresolved and education policy and practice remain narrowly framed.* The period following the transition to democracy in South Africa was filled with hope of social transformation and raised expectations for a better life, especially among black South Africans. Unfortunately, these expectations severely underestimated the magnitude of the many challenges facing a country which had undergone over 300 years of exploitation and violence. In the new South Africa, education has done little to support social change and transformation. Many communities, especially communities populated by poor and working class South Africans, continue to be plagued by high levels of crime and violent crime, violence against women (including domestic violence and rape), poor delivery of basic and social services (e.g. counseling services and police protection), and high levels of drug and alcohol abuse. According to Abrahams et al. (as cited in Jewkes et al., 2009) South Africa's rate of violent death for men is eight times the global average. In a study by Dunkle et al. (2004), 28% of South African male participants reported having perpetrated rape; in a separate study by Vetten et al. (2008), which focused on rape and sexual violence in Gauteng province, more than a third of female participants reported having experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. The incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome in South Africa is among the highest in the world (SANCA, 2014). Social ills persist and eat away at the possibilities available through education. The education system and the state are implicated in this failure to transform society.

The scale of the above challenges in South Africa is greater than in almost any other country in the world. A near majority South African youth recognize, and in fact, live surrounded by the failures of misguided policy, false hope, and stalled transformation. As a result, many youth feel cynical, hopeless, or nihilistic. Alexander (2013) writes,

The simple fact is that if young people in the townships and in the rural areas are unemployed, hungry, frustrated and angry, they will, under these circumstances, resort to theft and even murder in order to live like those few others who, by grace of birth or because of political patronage, belong to the new elite. (p.194)

In this research I identify youth as both a vulnerable and potentially transformative population in a troubled society. I draw on the data collected through this research to argue that developing a new vision for secondary education (and, more broadly, working with youth) is of paramount importance if South Africa is to make progress toward the social change agenda expressed by teachers and learners participating in this research. Put another way, if social justice and transformation are sought, then limiting education to meeting workforce development goals is not enough.

Secondary education in South Africa

Education in South Africa is compulsory up to the age of 15, Grade 9. Following basic education, learners may continue along one of three paths to complete their Grade 10-12 education: enrollment in an academic secondary school, enrollment in a technical secondary school, or enrollment at a Further Education and Training (FET) college. The majority of learners in South Africa, over 2.6 million, enroll in academic secondary schools. Academic secondary schools are historically associated with university preparation, and as such, focus on preparing learners for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) exam taken in Grade 12. The majority of learners in academic secondary schools enroll in courses in the sciences or business studies. Discourse on secondary education reform is often framed in terms of improving NSC pass rates. This is because learners' NSC results mediate, in part, their entry to tertiary education. The majority of secondary school leavers are not absorbed into universities: public universities only have space to admit approximately 30% of secondary school leavers annually.

Compared to academic secondary schools, FET colleges enroll a smaller, though by no means insignificant, number of learners (just under 140,000 learners in 2012) in the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) program. The NCV was first offered in 2007 and is often characterized as a vocational or a second-chance program for non-academically oriented students and high school dropouts. The NCV curriculum requires students to take three foundational subjects (English, mathematics, and Life Orientation) and four

other subjects associated with an occupational area. The vast majority (over 90%) of NCV students choose to study occupational areas associated with science, engineering, technology, or business and management studies. Compared to learners in academic secondary schools, NCV students in FET colleges are older, (e.g., the majority of learners are between the ages of 18-24) and are more likely to have a background of academic failure and poverty. A learner graduating from the NCV program is considered to have attained the equivalent of a grade 12 education and may transition to higher levels of education.

Policy discourse on the NSC and the NCV highlight the importance of preparing youth for further education and the world of work and of the contribution of human capital formation to South Africa's economic growth. A recent report commissioned by the Minister of Basic Education argues that, "South Africa should communicate a clear and unambiguous vision of its economic future and how it can be reached, and that the education system be shaped by that vision" (DBE, 2014a, p.13). In a recent policy statement, the South Africa Department for Higher Education and Training emphasizes that its "highest priority is to strengthen and expand public FET colleges" which includes "increasing headcount enrollment to one million by 2015 and 2.5 million by 2030" (DHET, 2014, p. xii). The rationale for making FET enrollment expansion a high priority is based on the assumption that education will provide skills for the labor market and that skills development will address the challenges of persistently high unemployment, especially among youth. Given my interests in constructions of secondary education and the skills discourse, I designed my research to consider academic (NSC) and vocational (NCV) constructions of upper secondary education. I decided not to include technical secondary schools as only a small number of learners take NSC exams in "technical" subjects (e.g., civil technology, mechanical technology, agricultural technology, and electrical technology).

I also choose to look specifically at the NCV program because of the comparison it offers to the NSC. The NCV offers a new way of thinking about secondary education: (i) it suggests that secondary education can accommodate the diverse interests and talents of all learners, (ii) it has a greater emphasis on practical and contextualized learning and skills development experiences, (iii) it evaluates students using practical and theoretical

tasks throughout the school year (as opposed to an end of cycle exam), (iv) it offers a blend of foundational skills development (numeracy, literacy, and life orientation), development of knowledge, and development (and demonstration) of skills, and (v) it aspires to better bridge the divide between school, the community, and the local economy. Put another way, the NCV program offers ideas and experiences which could support the development of a more holistic youth development model.

Global discourses on secondary education and skills

The recent experience of secondary education and skills development reform in South Africa draws on ideas and discourses which are articulated globally. A recent issue of NORRAG News captures the global skills zeitgeist. Norrag News 48 is titled, *2012: The Year of Global Reports on TVET, Skills & Jobs*.⁴ The publication documents the extensive recent discourse in academic and policy circles at directing state and global post-basic education and skills development efforts toward jobs: job creation, jobs for the marginalized, jobs to provide income and support livelihoods, jobs in an increasingly global and competitive world, jobs for the knowledge economy, good work, decent work, and better jobs (King, 2013). The report summarizes and provides commentary on several recent and high profile publications, including efforts from UNECSO (e.g., the 2012 Global Monitoring Report and the World TVET Report), the World Bank (e.g., the 2013 World Development Report), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives, 2012), the McKinsey Global Institute (2012), the International Labour Organization (2012), and the Asian Development Bank (MacLean et al., 2013). Arguing for a Global Monitoring Report focused on skills, King and Palmer (2008) identify the development of the skills discourse as follows:

The national context has certainly differed from country to country, but the following elements can be recognized as contributing to the greater visibility of skills in political, economic, and community agendas: i) the success of universal primary education (UPE), and the consequent pressures for the expansion of post-basic education; ii) an increasing emphasis on skills for global competitiveness and for poverty reduction; iii) a growing emphasis on holistic, sector-wide approaches to education and training, and not just a priority for UPE; iv) in many

⁴ TVET is Technical and Vocational Education and Training

developing countries, a strong political assumption that skills development can tackle unemployment. (p. 7-8)

The lead editorial in *Norrag News* 48, however, acknowledges “skills for jobs” to be a misleading equation noting,

There is a widespread assumption, especially amongst politicians, that the supply of skills creates jobs. This ‘supply-side’ approach to skills development is commonplace, but it has little evidence to support it. (King, 2013, p. 6)

In South Africa, the skills for jobs and growth discourse is manifested in several recent policy statements, including the *Green Paper on Further Education and Training: Preparing for the Twenty-First Century through Education, Training and Work* (DBE, 1998), *The Ministerial Task Team Report on the National Senior Certificate* (DBE, 2014a), the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (DHET, 2014), the *National Skills Development Strategy III* (DHET, 2011) and the National Planning Commission’s *National Development Plan* (NPC, 2011).

International discourse on reform of secondary and vocational education also privilege human capital discourses. Two major policy statements from the World Bank (World Bank, 2005; World Bank, 2008) argue that increased investment in secondary education will support economic growth and poverty reduction goals by helping countries deal with economic and social change, specifically the demand for a more educated worker in a changing economy “driven by technology, and part of global networks of production and trade” (World Bank, 2008, p. 1). Both reports argue that secondary schools need to impart new knowledge and skills including higher-level cognitive skills (e.g., problem-solving); metacognitive and non-cognitive skills (e.g., working in teams, resolving conflict, and dealing with ambiguity); skills in areas of ICT, math, science and technology; employability skills to enter the world of work; and lifelong learning skills to respond to changing economies and labor markets. Vocational education at the upper secondary level is seen as “improving the chances of youth who are economically and academically disadvantaged in gaining stable wage employment or self-employment” (Oketch, 2007, p. 230). Referencing the ILO and a productivism paradigm, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2011) argues that,

Skills development connects education to technical training, technical training to labour market entry, and labour market entry to the workplace and lifelong

learning, which help countries sustain productivity and translate growth into more and better jobs (ILO, 2008). (p. 49)

On the expectations of FET colleges in South Africa, Powell (2012) notes,

Simultaneously, they are to respond to the social disparities of apartheid by providing disadvantaged communities with access to high quality and relevant education and training that provides the skills and attitudes required for employability, including – within the context of insufficient jobs in the formal economy – training for entrepreneurship (Badroodien and Kraak, 2006) and for the informal economy (King and McGrath, 1999). Colleges also have an important role to play in providing second chance and non-traditional access routes to higher education (McGrath et al., 2010). (p. 645)

There are several critiques of the “skills” discourse. Economists and political economists argue that education alone cannot address social structures and policies which contribute to poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Critiques from critical, rights-based, and capabilities perspectives argue against a narrow, human capital, framing of education and offer a much broader understanding of and vision for secondary education and human development (see Chapter 2).

Education and society in South Africa

While I earlier provided a brief overview of secondary education in South Africa, it will be useful in introducing this research to provide a bit more historical background on education and society in South Africa. Such background not only provides some context, but also shows how global education discourses have been engaged with in debates over education and national development in South Africa.

Apartheid legacies cast a long shadow over present-day South Africa. Alexander (2013) identifies the Apartheid era as one of *racial capitalism*, where racist ideologies and a regime of capitalist exploitation were put in force through laws, violence, and discursive structures oppressive to black South Africans. Apartheid structures enforced geographic separation, segmentation of educational institutions and labor structures, and separate treatment of people in political and legal arenas based on racial categories. Under apartheid, black South Africans lived in a state of extreme insecurity: black South Africans were systematically and forcibly relocated to townships outside of white cities and designated Bantustans, worked in white-owned industries and households for inferior wages and with few rights, and provided education in institutions with inferior resources

and grounded in ideologies which sought to justify the inferior humanity, social, and economic status of black South Africans.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, arguing for a new consciousness and vision for education among black South Africans, Steven Biko (2014), leader of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa writes,

The fact that apartheid has been tied up with white supremacy, capitalist exploitation, and deliberate oppression makes the problem much more complex. Material want is bad enough, but coupled with spiritual poverty [a life devoid of all meaning] it kills. ...reduced to an oblique shell, he [the black man] looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the 'inevitable position.' (p. 27-28)

Based on the efforts of Biko, and others, secondary schools and universities became sites of struggle against apartheid. In 1976, over 20,000 students in Soweto secondary schools took part in a protest against the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in secondary schools. The Soweto Uprising is just one of hundreds of events which show the violence of the multi-decade struggle against apartheid: that day nearly 200 students were killed by South African security forces. Following the Soweto uprising, on a school wall was written a summary of Bantu education, "Enter to learn, learn to serve" (Kanfer, 1993, p. 321). While popular movements and schools played an important role up to the transition from apartheid government, during and shortly following the transition to democracy, the education sector "saw a major demobilization of mass organizations in education and the absorption of many previous activists into government" (Chisholm, 2012, p. 89). Characterizing education at the time of the transition to the new democracy, Chisholm (2012) notes,

Massive inequalities in every aspect of educational provision combined with high levels of poverty resulted by 1994 in an inheritance of deep differences between black and white educational provision in school resourcing, infrastructure, teacher quality and post-school and employment futures. (p. 89)

Since South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, one can trace two distinct discourses influencing the debate on secondary education and skills development in South Africa. The dominant perspective draws on neoliberal economic thought and human capital discourses, which argue that secondary education, should provide education and skills relevant to the labor market to promote economic growth and global

competitiveness. The second discourse privileges the importance of education for social justice and transformation: that education should play a central role in undoing the racist, exploitative legacies of apartheid and expand opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups. Motala and Pampallis (2001) pose this dual emphasis as a fundamental contradiction: neoliberal macro-economic policies, (e.g., marketization of education, public–private partnerships, fiscal austerity, budgetary constraints, cost containment and cuts to education identified in Vally and Spreen, 2006) were irreconcilable with the state’s social justice intentions. Spreen and Vally (2010a) identify a profound in education policy in South Africa over the past two decades “from the original egalitarian premises established by the democratic movement in the early 1990s (namely ‘peoples’ education’ aimed at equity and redress) and toward an embrace of elitist policies driven by neoliberal market ideology” (p. 438).

The experience of the new curriculum, first implemented in 1997, embodies this tension. DBE (2012a) identifies the new curriculum as articulating,

the vision for general education to move away from a racist, apartheid, rote model of learning and teaching, to a liberating, nation-building and learner-centred outcomes-based initiative. At the centre of its vision are learners who will be inspired by the values of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice. (p. 21)

Spreen and Vally (2010b) identify the “dual challenge” facing curriculum designers, noting,

the first [challenge] was the ‘post-Apartheid’ challenge which is to ensure the requisite knowledge, values, and skills base which will, in turn, ‘provide the conditions for greater social justice, equity and development’. The second challenge was the need to align the curriculum to...‘global competitiveness’ explained as providing the ‘platform for developing knowledge, skills and competencies for innovation, social development and economic growth for the 21st century.’ (p. 44-45)

Policies put in place during the transition period, including the establishment of fee-paying, Model C schools. While supporting racial integration, Model C schools also re-constituted provision of education along class lines, leaving the majority of black South Africans in poorly resourced and supported schools (Chisholm, 2004). Spaul (2011) argues that South Africa today remains “a tale of two schools: one which is wealthy,

functional and able to educate students, while the other is poor, dysfunctional, and unable to equip students” (p.26) with basic skills.

Critics of post-apartheid progress in secondary and vocational education point to high rates of dropout in secondary school, “abysmal” performance on international assessments and the large number of youth who are neither in education, employment or training. To be specific:

- Between 10th and 12th grade close to 500,000 leave secondary school and secondary GER drops from 100% to 57% (DBE, 2011a; DBE, 2012c).
- On international assessments designed to measure literacy, math, and other basic cognitive skills (e.g., TIMSS, PIRLS, SACMEQ), South Africa is consistently at the bottom of international rankings.⁵
- Thirty-three (33) percent (over 3.4 million) of the age 15-24 population in South Africa is in neither education, employment or training (DHET, 2014).

The above data are often interpreted as evidence that the school system (i.e., teachers, school managers, and the government) is failing youth. However, many voices argue that challenges in education must be considered in the context of an economic and social structure which perpetuates poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

The expectation that investment in education and skills would lead to jobs, growth and reductions in inequality has not materialized. The experience of South Africa suggests that, on its own, supply-side skills development has been insufficient for meeting economic and job growth goals. Wedekind (2014) argues that this critique has been ignored by post-apartheid education policymakers. He writes,

Vocational education and the lead institution, colleges, are seen as fundamental to solving a problem [unemployment] that is not primarily an educational problem. There is a continual anxious hand wringing at the failures of the colleges and the VET system generally, followed by a new set of reforms that repeatedly aim at the same thing: making the colleges more responsive through curriculum reforms, capital investment and training. The latest proposals are not significantly different

⁵ TIMSS is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study; PIRLS is the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study and SACMEQ is the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality. PIRLS and SACMEQ are assessments at the basic education level’ TIMSS is an assessment at the 8th/9th grade level.

to previous reforms and it is likely that they will fail again because they do not and cannot address the underlying problems [of society]. (p.76)

Wedekind indicates that adherents of human capital discourse can only understand unemployment as a failure of education: a scarcity of skill, a mismatch, or a gap. Critics of the “failing schools” discourse suggest instead that we re-examine the failure of economic and social policy to explain the persistence of poverty, inequality, and joblessness, as well as to explain persistent challenges facing the education sector (Alexander, 2013; Vally & Motala, 2014).

Constructivist and sociological perspectives offer other explanations of the challenges facing secondary education in South Africa. Samoff (2008) summarizes the dilemma following massification of secondary education, noting,

...opening the gates wider to welcome more students into a system whose structure remains fundamentally elitist does not and cannot convert it into a mass education system. That transformation requires philosophical and programmatic changes that have only begun to be explored. (p. xv)

Echoing this concern, Spreen and Vally (2010b) note that the “vast majority of teachers were educated under apartheid, they had little experience with learner-centred education, constructing curriculum or being empowered to engage in their own intellectual work to develop alternatives” (p. 48). Alexander (2013) and Motala and Vally (2014) argue that a vision for education cannot be considered separately from a vision for new society: a non-racial, democratic republic free of capitalist exploitation and racist oppression, defined by the values of freedom, equality, solidarity, and democracy and in opposition to attempts to divide the population on the basis of language, religion, tribe, or caste. Motala and Vally (2014) continue, arguing for the necessity of a moral narrative, uncorrupted by consumerism, avarice and the glorification of ostentatious consumption. These are the heady, and important, education debates carried daily in South Africa’s newspapers and articulated in ministerial speeches: What do we do about poverty, inequality, and development? What is the role of education in all of this? (Klees, 2008, p. 303). Is “skills for jobs” the way forward for secondary education? Will increased testing improve quality? Is increased tertiary access inherently good? Or, do we need to re-imagine the purpose of secondary education to move closer to a vision of a new, democratic South Africa?

Research questions

As noted earlier, the purpose of this research is to elicit and compare perspectives on the purpose of secondary education. In this exercise, I hope to identify alternative perspectives and share lived experiences, as well as to also identify biases, gaps, and silences in dominant discourses on, and constructions of, secondary education. To organize my research, data collection and analysis, I have articulated my research objectives into four overarching questions:

Research Question 1: From the perspectives of teachers and learners in/from historically marginalized communities, what are the purposes of secondary education?

Research Question 2: How do teachers and learners in/from historically marginalized communities describe the experience of secondary school?

Research Question 3: What do teachers and learners in/from historically marginalized communities recommend changing about the existing model/vision of secondary education?

Research Question 4: How do perspectives of teachers and learners in historically marginalized communities compare with dominant global and national discourses on secondary education and skills?

The final question, a comparative question, requires a brief elaboration. How do I describe “dominant global and national discourses on secondary education and skills?” The next chapter identifies varied rationales for human development. I argue that there are three main features to the dominant discourse. First, that the purpose of secondary education is conceived of through human capital and productivist perspectives: that investment in human capital formation through education and skill development is justified for the contribution of such capital to economic growth and job creation. A second feature of the discourse defines secondary education in terms of endpoints: secondary is defined as preparation for university study or entry into the world of work. I later elaborate on this as the “two-paths” model. Both paths are framed from a human capital perspective in which youth are conceptualized as future workers. A third feature of the dominant discourse is the absence of political economy and sociological perspectives on the relationship between education, work, and society. If we bring in

other perspectives, education can be interpreted as playing a role in legitimizing and reproducing inequality in society, schooling as differentiating between elite and democratic forms of knowledge and society, and human capital perspectives as promoting credentialism and qualification inflation (as opposed to ‘education’).

Conceptual framework

To help me think about and through the research questions, I created a conceptual framework. This conceptual framework offers a normative way to understand the construction of secondary education in a changing society. The conceptual framework is organized into three separate parts: understanding of reality, elements of human development, and goals of human development.

Understanding of reality. My understanding of reality draws on two perspectives: critical social theory and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model. I understand reality to be a social construction, laden with unequal power, and in an ongoing process of being constructed and re-constructed through individual and collective actions. Individual and social action holds the power to reproduce, resist, and transform social relations and our construction of social reality. My understanding of the ecological system draws on the work of Bronfenbrenner, whose ecological systems theory offers a socio-cultural understanding of influences on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

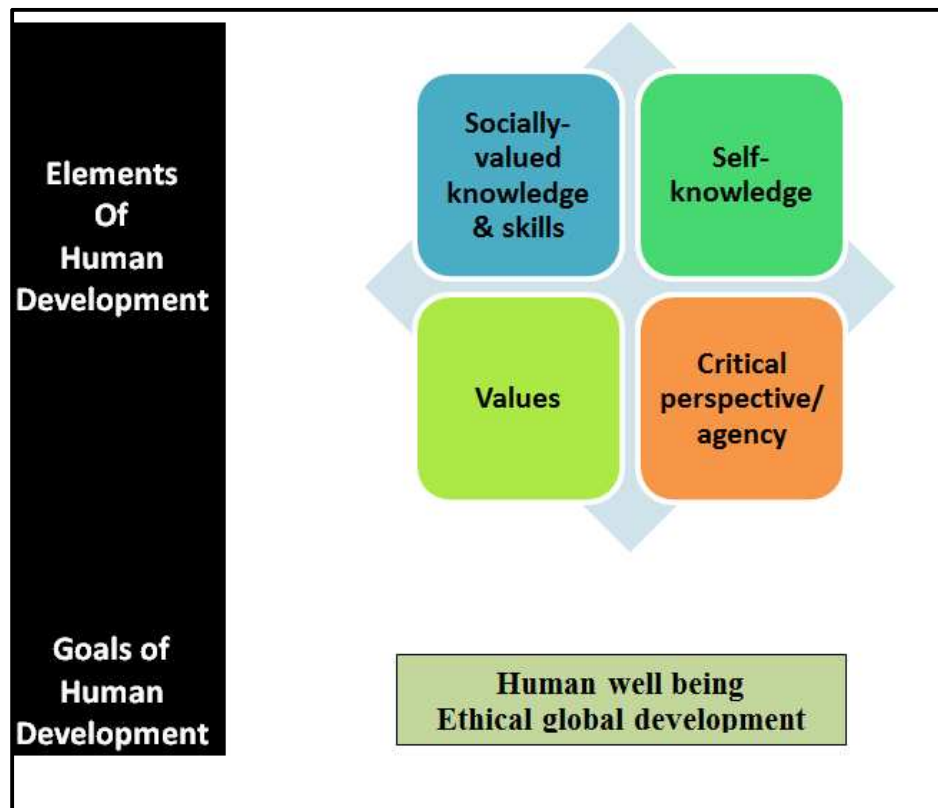
Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model identifies four systems: micro, meso, exo, and macro which influence, directly or indirectly, influence human development. Direct influences may include parents, family, friends, people, and institutions in the community (e.g., school, athletic clubs, and religious institutions). Indirect influences may include the effects of globalization, history, political and social struggles, and so on.⁶ Combining critical social theory with Bronfenbrenner’s model suggests that perspectives of reality vary based on an individual’s location and status within an unequal power space. In South Africa, a black South African growing up in a township is faced with a different ecological system than an Indian South African growing up in a middle-class suburb.

⁶ This understanding of reality also allows us to understand the concept of “youth” as a social construction. While “youth” go through a biological process of physical growth as they transition to the body of an adult, a social construction of “youth” includes social expectations: When should they be students? When should they be married? What is their role in the family structure? What marks them as youth? As adults?

Notably, social constructions of knowledge, education, and success may privilege some individuals and groups over others.

The second part of this conceptual framework is comprised of “elements of human development.” Here I identify four elements which shape human development in an ecological system: values, self-knowledge, socially-valued knowledge and skills, and critical perspective and agency. These elements draw on three main perspectives, the types of learning valued in the Delors Report (UNESCO, 1996), the agency-focused capabilities approach articulated by David Crocker (2008) and Amartya Sen (1999) and critical social theory. Figure 1 identifies two parts of my conceptual framework: human development elements and human development goals.

Figure 1: Human development elements and goals



Values can be defined as, “principles or standards of behavior; one’s judgment of what is important in life.”⁷ A report commissioned by the South Africa Department of Education on Values, Education and Democracy argues that “value construction is intimately related to how people think and construct meaning, and the relationship between action and ideas” (DoE, 2000, p. 8) and identifies schools as sites of value construction. If we acknowledge that all people, including educators and learners, live and act based on an underlying, if mutable, set of values, then we come to see education and human development as necessarily embedded in some set of values. The question is: “what values are expressed, deliberately, or tacitly, through education?”

The next element is *self-knowledge*. Teachers and learners I spoke with respected each learner’s individuality and difference, and identified the importance of education in helping individual learners develop self-knowledge. Human development is intimately related to the development of self-knowledge: through exposure to new information and ideas, fields of knowledge and skill, people, and experiences. Reflection on and dialogue over learning experiences can contribute to an individuals’ development of self-knowledge.

The third element is *socially-valued knowledge and skills*. Knowledge and skills which are socially valued change as society changes, but reflect some agreement on what knowledge and skills are socially important. The Delors report (UNESCO, 1996) offers a framework which identifies four different types of learning: Learning to Know (learning for the sake of learning, learning how to learn); Learning to Do (learning focused the development of particular skills, often considered in terms of workforce relevance and national economic development); Learning to Live Together (learning focused on understanding other people, the appreciation of interdependence and respecting pluralism, mutual understanding and peace) and Learning to Be (learning to develop the ethical, spiritual, and other self-regulating and self-understanding dimensions of the self).

⁸ I argue that schooling predominantly focuses on this element of human development, focusing on academic and vocational knowledge and skills development organized around particular fields.

⁷ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/value>

⁸ Learning is defined as to gain or acquire knowledge of or skill in (something) by study, experience, or being taught and covers concepts of knowledge and skill and is related to values and capabilities.

The final element is *critical perspective and agency*. A critical perspective recognizes that one of the most important goals of education should be the examination of “how we have been constructed out of the prevailing ideas, values and worldviews of the dominant culture,” (McLaren, 2008, p. 80). This element relates human development to an ecological context which is shaped in part by unequal power relations and argues that a critical perspective is needed for individuals to understand their reality and play a role in shaping their own development. *Agency* is expressed when individuals and groups act to “shape their own destiny.” Expressions of agency may include making decisions, helping others, and taking actions to effect individual or social change (Sen, 1999, as referenced in Crocker, 2008). Expression of agency is closely linked to values: an individual or group may act to effect change based on a particular value, interest, or objective. This understanding of agency also identifies the present and future-oriented nature of human development. An individual may act in the present in an effort to achieve an aspired-to future.

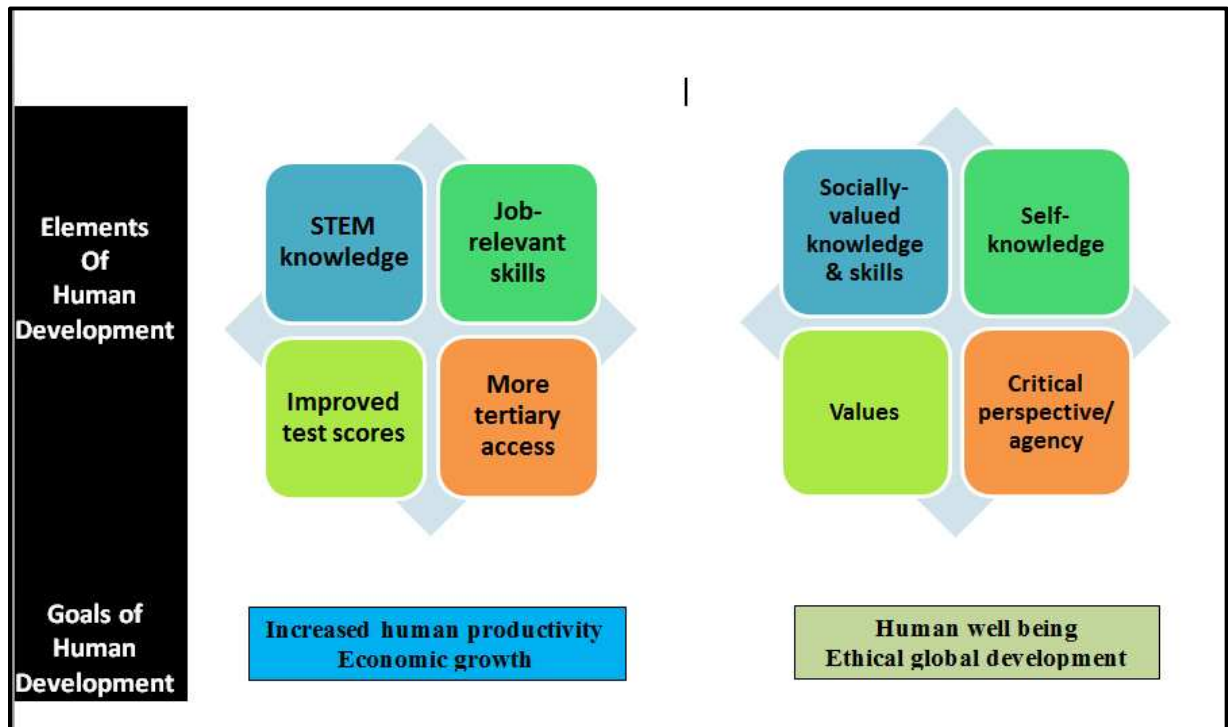
These four elements are inter-related amongst themselves, as well as with understandings of reality and human development goals. As noted earlier, I draw extensively on the *agency-focused capabilities* approach to discuss elements of human development, and specifically those of self-knowledge and socially-valued knowledge and skills. McGrath (2012a) argues that a capabilities approach offers a set of first principles through which to understand the varied ways in which human potential can unfold. He further notes that from this set of first principles can be constructed “a more radical notion of learning for life” which may include education and learning for cultural understanding, spiritual development, leisure, care-giving, and community development. The capabilities approach uses the broad concept of “capabilities.” In my conceptual framework, I choose to use four specific elements so that I can more explicitly highlight the role of social construction in defining and privileging certain types of capabilities.

The third part of my conceptual framework identifies human development goals. From my perspective, the goals of human development can be separated into two questions: “What is our vision for the world we want?” and “What approaches to education and learning are most likely to help us create that world?” (CERT, 2013, p. 1). I again draw on the capabilities approach to argue that education can play a role in

supporting the unfolding of human potential in ways which promote human well-being and ethical global development. Embedded in the concept of ethical global development is the goal of social justice. The elements and the goals included in the framework indicate that the purpose of education is co-constructed between an individual and society. Taken as a whole, my conceptual framework offers a specific understanding of social reality, identifies elements of human development, and proposes goals for human development. This framework provides a heuristic and normative grounding for my research. Importantly, this framework also allows me consider the influence of structural inequality and marginalization using tools from political economy.

In the dissertation, I will regularly underscore the extent to which dominant policy discourses in education and skills development are shaped by neoliberal economic goals and perspectives (which emphasize STEM fields and job-relevant skills) and elite-understandings of quality (which emphasize improved test scores and increased tertiary access). I'll then juxtapose dominant perspectives with the perspectives of research participants. Research participants generally offer a more holistic conception of human development. This conception includes elements identified in my normative framework (e.g., values and self-knowledge), as well as specific, "socially-valued knowledge and skills," such as technical skills in particular occupational areas, knowledge related to a field of study or career, life skills, resolving conflict, or getting to know your friends, classmates, or community at a deeper level. In figure 2, I compare the human development framework articulated by the dominant discourse (left) with my normative framework (right). Findings chapters (chapters 9-11), my chapter summarizing research implications (chapter 12), and my final chapter, which includes recommendations, all make reference to the ideas and comparisons presented in this figure.

**Figure 2: Comparing two human developmental models:
the dominant discourse and my normative framework**



Aspiration-scape and agency-space

Through engaging in this research, I have also been provided with an opportunity to wrestle with, and perhaps contribute to, the development of theory. My data and findings points to two potential theoretical contributions to the capabilities approach: development of the concepts *aspiration-scape* and *agency-space*. I define *aspiration-scape* as the extent of one's capability to imagine varied and desired futures for oneself. Powell (2013) draws on the capabilities approach to suggest that education can develop one's "capability to aspire." Frye, a sociologist, echoes this conceptualization and goes on to define aspiration as an "assertion of a future identity." Appadurai (1996), an anthropologist, and Carney (2009), a scholar in comparative education, use the concept of "scapes" to provide to identify six "scapes" – ethnoscape, technoscape, finanscape, media-scape, ideoscape, and policy-scape – which contribute to the global exchange of

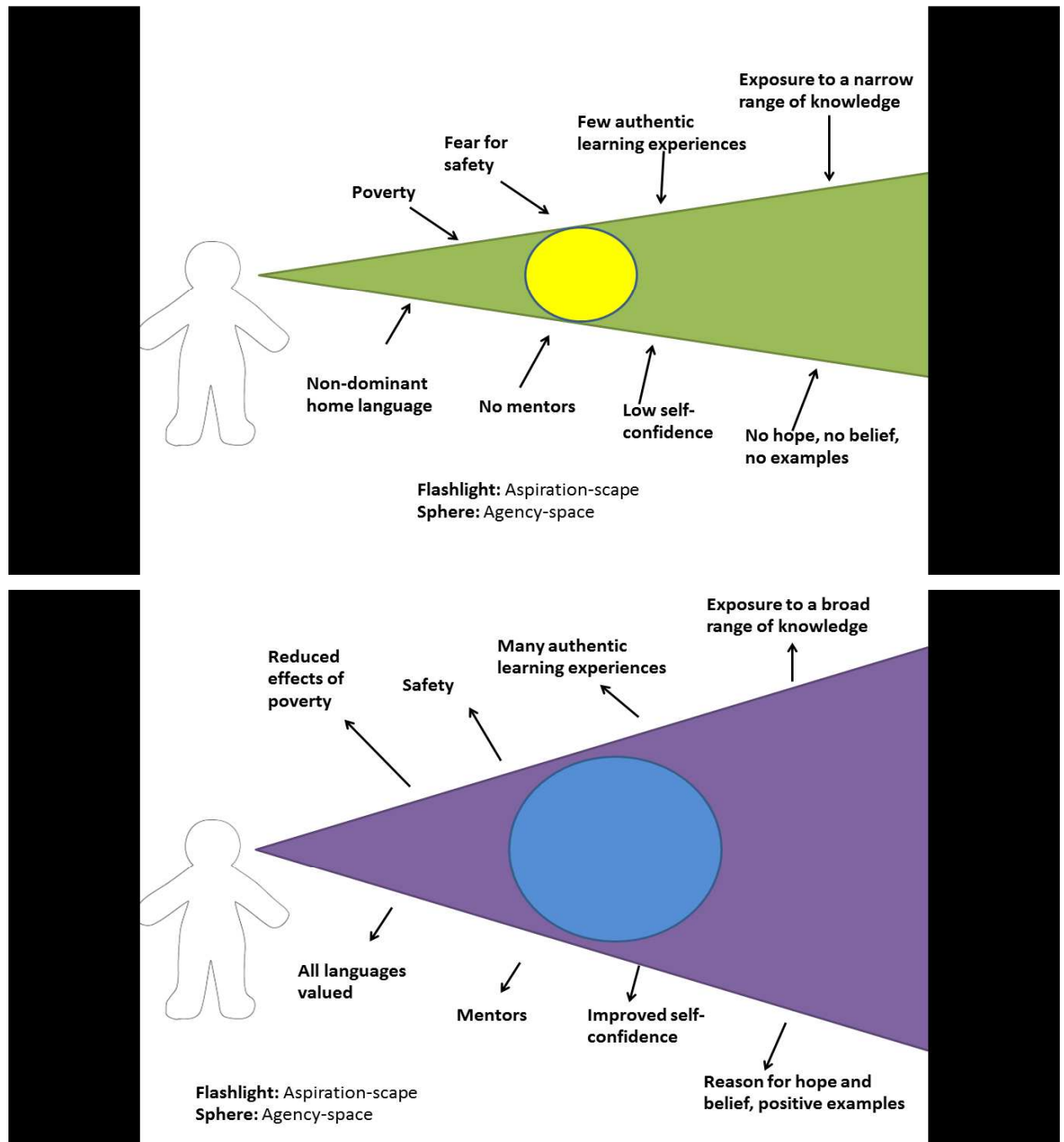
ideas and information. They argue that while these scapes contribute to information exchange, the interpretation of this information, and of social reality, is in part shaped by individual perspectives. A student's aspiration-scape may reflect the extent to which he or she is exposed to other scapes, how he or she interprets information and ideas received via different scapes, and on his or her *agency-space*, the socially-constructed space in which an individual can act to shape his or her own destiny.

I draw on these two concepts to emphasize several issues which emerged in this research. In this research, one of the most important issue that emerged is the relationship between learners' agency-space and their aspiration-scape, or put another way, the relationship between a learners' "possibilities for present-action" and "richness and variety of potential futures which could be imagined" by learners. "Aspiration-scape" is defined from the perspective of the individual. I may imagine different futures and possibilities for a learner: however, the learner's aspiration-scape includes only the future possibilities perceived of by the learner. Both concepts identify with the possibilities and limitations (structure and agency) of lived experiences and social structures. Expansion of either agency-space or aspiration-scape can be argued to expand the possibility for a learner to contribute to his or her own well-being and as well as contribute to ethical community development.

Figure 3 identifies elements which may constrain or expand an individual's agency-space and aspiration-scape.⁹ In the first figure, constraining factors include those related and unrelated to education including poverty, limited adult guidance, exposure to a narrow range of knowledge and few authentic learning experiences, and fear for one's safety. In the second figure, the arrows point in a different direction to suggest that several things can be done to expand an individual's agency-space and aspiration-scape.

⁹ Ideology can also be a factor which limits an individuals' aspiration-scape and agency-space

Figure 3: Aspiration-scape and agency-space (factors constraining / factors expanding)



This conceptual framework allows us to consider several of the tensions identified in the research questions about the relationship between education, work, and society and the possibilities for and limitations to human development. The first tension is in the

relationship between the different elements of human development. The dominant discourse focuses on socially-valued knowledge and skills, specifically, skills to pass the NSC and “skills for jobs.” I argue that a skills development focus, wrongly places “skills development” before development of self-knowledge. If we focus on self-knowledge, we can see a role for education to help learners understand who they are, what they are interested in, and what they are good at. From this point, an individual can follow a particular knowledge or skills development path. The focus on skills and testing also diminishes other possibilities for education in developing learner agency, encouraging social change, or, in the words of Steven Biko, constructing a “culture of positive values” (Alexander, 2013; DHET, 2012).

The second tension relates to South Africa’s transformation from an *elite* to a *mass* or *democratized* model of upper secondary education. In South Africa, rapid expansion in black South Africans’ access to secondary school took place from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s (Crouch & Vinjevoold, 2006). However, the construction of knowledge and the practice of education and learning remain elite-defined, focusing on academic preparation for tertiary education. The NCV program offers an alternative way to think about supporting the diverse learning interests and needs of South Africa’s youth. The program also speaks to a deficiency in the elite-model: the separation of education from the lives of learners, or put another way, the decontextualization of education. This concern raises the tension: how can education meet some minimum set of goals for all South African youth while also nurturing the interests and talents of individual learners. In the U.S., the goal of TC Williams High School in Alexandria, VA offers an example. The school has a goal of promoting the college-readiness of all students as well as offering courses and an environment with supports the development of knowledge and skills based on a variety of individual student interests. This tension, however, is also related to a third tension: the relationship between education and skills development to work and society.

The third tension recognizes education as a constituent part of South Africa’s political economy and social life – in which economic and social structures and unequal power relations perpetuate widespread poverty, insecurity, inequality, and exclusion. While the government of South Africa has significantly increased the progressivity of

public expenditure on education over the past decade and instituted a range of programs designed to support efforts of redress and social protection, levels of inequality and unemployment have remained persistently high and results on national exams and international assessments show persistent inequalities by class (by income quintile), race, geographic location, and former department (Christie, 2007; DBE, 2012a; HSRC, 2011; Spaul, 2012; Taylor, 2011).¹⁰ Associated with oppressive social structures and the persistence of poverty are a myriad of issues facing youth living in township areas: structural violence, the normalization of violence and substance abuse; xenophobia, migration, and partial-parenting; corruption and mistrust in government; the co-existence of expressions of aspiration and hope amid alienation and despair (Swartz, 2007). Critics argue of the need to also address social structures perpetuating these broader ills and, as well, of the importance of broader conceptualization of the possibilities of education (CERT, 2013; Motala & Vally, 2013; Wedekind, 2014).

Each of these tensions correspond to different perspectives on the role of education in society and reflect varied responses to a variety of complex issues, including pressure to expand access to the post-schooling sector, pressure to reduce dropout and improve quality in secondary schools and FET colleges, pressure to address structural inequality and improve social cohesion through education policy, pressure to instrumentalize education to support the achievement of economic growth goals, and pressure to construct broader conceptualizations of education grounded in the unfolding of human potential, the development of agency, and the realization of rights. These issues are discussed in more detail in the next two chapters.

Dissertation contents

This dissertation is organized into thirteen chapters. The next two chapters provide general background, as well as my perspective, on human development and political economy. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 offer a review of the literature on secondary education and skill discourses globally and in South Africa. Chapter 7 outlines research methods. Chapters 8 through 12 present empirical data and research findings. Chapter 13 offers recommendations and revisits the conceptual framework.

¹⁰ “Former department” refers the race-based administration of schools under tricameralism. See Chapter six for more detail.

Chapter 2: Human development: perspectives and critiques

Varied perspectives

The structure, substance, and aspirations of education and schooling reflect social choices. These choices are informed by different understandings of truth and knowledge, by different perspectives on human development, and different understandings of the relationship between education, work, and society. In most modern states, human development in the form of schooling up to and through upper secondary has multiple goals, including preparing youth for further education and learning, successful entry into the world of work, transition into adult roles, responsibilities and citizenship, and expanding knowledge. This short list reflects some of the dominant perspectives on education: education may also be purposed to meet goals of cultural understanding, moral and spiritual development, and care-giving or community development, among other things (McGrath, 2012a).

This chapter provides an overview and explores critiques of, economic, sociological, rights-based, and capabilities understandings of and rationales for human development. The persistence of this debate not only reflects significant differences between different disciplines and development paradigms, but also reflects a widespread recognition of education's potentially important role in developing human potential and facilitating positive social change. In addition to providing an overview of different perspectives on human development, this chapter briefly discusses concepts associated with "youth in development" and provides an overview of a normative "learning" framework which can be used to integrate different human development perspectives.

Human capital theory

Human capital theory is one of the dominant rationales for investment in education. "Human capital analysis assumes that schooling raises earnings and productivity mainly by producing knowledge, skills and a way of analyzing problems" (Becker, 1993, p. 19) and underpins arguments for investing in human development (education and skills) to improve individual earnings and economic growth and to promote skills for employability and jobs. National plans and education strategies in most low and middle income countries, and of several major multilateral and bilateral

development agencies, identify investment in human capital as a key strategy to improving individual welfare and promoting economic growth (DfID, 2010; USAID, 2010; World Bank, 2011).

As human capital theory gained prominence among educational economists, efforts were made to calculate returns to investment in education. Simply put, a rate of return analysis identifies the costs (e.g., direct fees, foregone earnings) and benefits (e.g., future earnings) associated with education (attainment or quality), and then calculates the return on investment (Patrinos & Psacharapoulous, 2010). Rate of return analysis has been used to justify investment in education generally, and vis-à-vis other sectors, and to argue for directing public investment to some levels of education over others, such as investment in basic over tertiary education (King & Palmer, 2006). In research on the relationship between education (e.g., cognitive skills as measured by PISA) and national economic growth, Hanushek and Wossermann (2009) argue that in an enabling environment, increased investment in human capital formation contributes to economic growth. The notion of “productivism” in VET literature provides a two-fold rationale for investment in human capital: that investment in skills leads to more productive workers and economic growth, and that skills improve workers’ employability and thus lead to an increase in jobs available (McGrath, 2012a).

There are several critiques of human capital theory and of the use of a human capital approach in education and human development. An initial critique is of assumptions embedded in the method used to calculate the rate of return. These assumptions including the need to estimate an individual’s wages forty or fifty years into the future and assuming that education attainment accounts for 60% of wage differential between individuals (Klees, 1994).¹¹ Kingdon and Soderbom (2007) are critical of some of the rates of return analyses done in African countries. Such analysis is often based on the wages of salaried workers, even though salaried workers may only account for 20-40% of the labor force. In these countries often the majority of workers are employed in subsistence agriculture or in the informal (non-salaried) sector.

Signaling theory offers an alternative explanation to individual earnings differentials. Signaling theory posits that individuals have innate levels of productivity

¹¹ Sometimes earnings functions are used to calculate the rate of return to investment in education.

(unaffected by education attainment) and that educational attainment and credentials merely provide potential employers a *signal* of individual productivity. In a review of the literature, Page (2010) concludes, “the extent to which education acts as a sorting device in addition to (or instead of) augmenting productivity, is still unknown” (p. 36).¹² Mediating effects of discrimination (by ethnicity, class, gender, language group, or nation of origin) on access to employment and earnings differentials has been the subject of extensive research by educational economists but is not explained by human capital theory. Klees (1991) summarizes some of the main critiques of rates of return analysis, noting,

Earnings are only a measure of marginal productivity if screening is not a problem; if government salary scales do not distort those in the private sector; if there is no minimum wage; if monopolies, oligopolies, and unions have no economic power; if gender, race, class, or other similar discrimination does not exist; if earnings measures include the monetary value of the intangible benefits of the job. (p. 726)

Several researchers (King & Palmer, 2006; Samoff & Carrol, 2003) identify the perverse impact of using rates of return analysis to privilege funding of basic education over tertiary education – a policy stance which ignores the important and necessary intersections between primary, secondary and tertiary education, including the development of teachers, the indigenous construction of new curriculum and knowledge, and the interaction between higher education, the government and the economy.

King (2011) and King and Palmer (2006) identify the influence of the enabling environment on economic growth, skills utilization and employment growth. King (2011) notes that skills utilization requires “supportive local economic environments. And these are in turn affected by the wider international, national (economic, political, socio-cultural) environments, and especially the labour market environment” (p. 2-3). Local economic environments may be influenced by access to infrastructure (e.g., water and electricity), access to credit and the availability of a minimum level of social protection, including access to public health. While a slight departure from human capital theory, productivism, in its “skills for jobs” logic, offers a reductive understanding of the causes of unemployment and the implications of increased productivity. High unemployment is

¹² Gunderson and Oreopoulos (2011) and Blaug (1987), an early proponent of human capital theory, echo this conclusion.

associated with many factors (e.g., government policy, international economic environments, and structural features of capitalism) other than skills deficits, and governments have several policy options through which to support, directly and indirectly, job growth. Further, the emergence of “more productive” workers, instead of contributing to job growth, may increase unemployment.

Another critique of human capital theory is that it offers an impoverished understanding of the possibilities of education in human life and society, that it instrumentalizes education and human beings to serve the needs of capital, and by doing so, it narrows the dialogical space in which education research, education reform, and social change should be conceived (McGrath, 2012a; Stromquist, 2002). Human capital analysis draws heavily on the quantitative and positivist approaches of economics, which often use test scores and GDP growth as proxies for educational quality and human and national well-being. Critics argue that GDP growth is a flawed measure of national development: A focus on productivity and GDP growth understates the importance of environmental goals, gender discrimination, democratic development, and worker’s rights to national well-being. A focus on cognitive skills narrows the educational agenda, can be used to argue for “back to basics” approaches, privileges narrow versions of testing, school choice and management and accountability reforms (which are purported to improve quality) but are silent (and often contravene progress toward) other goals of education and schooling (e.g., social cohesion, democratic development, teaching and learning in multi-cultural and multi-lingual classrooms, and moral development). A human capital paradigm privileges technical solutions: positivist and decontextualized answers to developmental challenges. Constructivists argue that a positivist conception of our social world is inherently flawed: the valuing of education and skills is dialectically related to the social construction of skills and related to power inequalities.

Critical theory, critical pedagogy

Human capital theory draws on the field of economics; critical social theories draw on sociology to explain phenomena observed in education. A starting point for critical social theorists is that social reality is a construct: norms, rules and expectations of human social interaction are co-constructed and regularly acted out. Critical theorists argue that social reality (e.g., the structures and institutions of society, social norms, and

constructions of knowledge) is often formed around the interests of a dominant culture (e.g., social practices and representations affirming the central values of the social class in control of a society's material and symbolic wealth) operating in a hegemonic relationship with other social groups (Lemert, 2002). McLaren (2008) notes that, "critical theorists begin with the premise that men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege" (p. 61).

In a social setting, truth does not exist outside of power/knowledge relations, but rather, is shaped by discursive practices. Truth is socially constructed, culturally mediated, and historically situated. Often a particular ideology, a thought framework for explaining or giving meaning to the social and political world, supports the maintenance of hegemony (McLaren, 2008). Referencing the work of Foucault, McLaren (2008) notes that these discursive practices include,

The rules by which discourses are formed, rules that govern what can be said and what must remain unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen. Social and political institutions, such as schools and penal institutions are governed by discursive practices. (p. 72)

The work of social and cultural reproduction theorists and the field of critical pedagogy draw on critical social theory.

Reproduction theorists argue that class structure is reproduced from one generation to the next and that schooling plays a central role in the reproduction and legitimization of social inequality. Most work falls along a continuum organized by structure and agency. Structuralists offer more deterministic arguments of social reproduction: they argue that social structures largely determine reproduction of social inequality. Theorists who give more weight to agency, the relative autonomy and experiences of individuals, may provide explanations of cultural reproduction, or, in the case of critical pedagogy, identify schools as possible sites of liberation from, or rupture of, social structures. Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that schools train the wealthy to take top places in the society and condition the poor to accept lower class status. Drawing on the Marxist principle of correspondence, Bowles and Gintis argue that relationships of authority and control in schools replicate those of the workplace: Education and schools reaching different tracks of students, or tracking within schools, emphasize different values to different classes of students. They argue further that

schooling promotes (and cannot be separated from) the ideology and values required by a capitalist economy. Bourdieu (1986) identifies schools as sites of cultural reproduction, which valorize upper class cultural capital (e.g., upper class cultures and experiences) and deal in a currency of credentials, thus providing a meritocratic explanation which legitimates the reproduction of social inequality.

Willis (1977) and MacLeod (1985) identify cultural milieus in which individuals from lower socio-economic classes live and interact, and through which they construct their aspirations and expectations. Dominant discursive structures may offer a backdrop to the construction of social reality, however, different groups (e.g., the lads, the Hallway Hangers) may valorize traits, behaviors, and conceptions of work, which reproduce culture, habits, aspirations, or proclivities which may then reproduce, and from the perspective of dominant discursive structures, legitimize inequality. Theories of resistance seek to break the structure-agency duality by identifying acts of resistance: expressions of agency, which in some cases reinforce social reproduction and in other cases transform or upend dominant structures (Giroux 2007; McLaren, 2008;). Socio-economic and cultural reproduction theorists identify the influence of capitalist structures, conceptions of masculinity and femininity, physical and mental work, and racist and colonial histories on the reproduction of social-economic and cultural inequality.

Critical pedagogy seeks to promote “a critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice and social change” (Ellsworth, 1989) by theorizing and operationalizing pedagogical challenges to oppressive social formations, such as racism, sexism, genderism, classism, Eurocentrism, xenophobia, homophobia, banking-models of education, to name a few. Critical pedagogy draws on critical social theory, identifies schools as sites of domination and potential liberation and seeks to empower students to claim their own power as critical agents. McLaren argues that “for too many minorities, schools have become cathedrals of death, agencies for reintegration, camps for ideological internment, factories for domestication,” (Steinberg, 2006, p.140). In the classroom setting, teachers and the curriculum introduce “a particular form of life,” where often dominant interests determine which books are used, which classroom approaches are employed, and what values and beliefs are transmitted to students. Critical

pedagogues argue that pedagogy and curriculum are inherently political and that “first of all, schooling should be a process of understanding how subjectivities are produced. It should be a process of examining how we have been constructed out of the prevailing ideas, values and worldviews of the dominant culture,” (McLaren, 2008, p. 80). Critical pedagogy seeks both to illuminate and fight, often explicitly against war, poverty, inequality and structural violence perpetuated by neoliberal, capitalist, and patriarchal ideologies. While critical pedagogy theories and practices draw on the work of Paulo Freire and educators in the United States (e.g., Peter McLaren, Lois Weis and Henry Giroux), George Sefa Dei (2006), Catherine Odora-Hoppers (2000) and Katherine Sivi-Njonjo (2011) identify oppressive social formations (e.g., colonial and post-colonial structures, class, gender, ethno-linguistic) perpetuated through schools in Ghana, South Africa and Kenya, respectively, and argue that development of a critical pedagogy is a crucial task for educators. Baatjes et al. (2014) write about the development of a transformative critical pedagogy in South African vocational education.

The work of Paulo Freire (1985 and 2003) provides an example of the practice of critical and constructivist theories in a research context. A Freirean perspective recognizes the importance of critique and dialogue insofar as these processes create space for individuals in marginalized communities to respond to and resist dominant discourse, collaboratively construct new knowledge, and articulate the way in which education can support the attainment of interests that learners express on their own terms. According to Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011), Freire adopted a critical and an emancipatory perspective in his work and approach to research and working with poor people. Freire did not define his research subjects in a conventional manner which sees subjects as being passive sources of data. Instead, “he (Freire) insisted on involving the people he studied as subjects, that is, as partners in the research process. He immersed himself in their ways of thinking and modes of perception, encouraging them all along to begin thinking about their own thinking” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p.164). Researchers drawing on the work of Freire conceptualize research as a learning journey which includes elements of self-criticism, investigation, collective processes of learning, practice, and theorization and reflections on power relations within society and the research process itself. Kincheloe et al. (2011) add,

After exploring the community around the school and engaging in conversations with community members, Freire constructed generative themes designed to tap into issues that were important to various students in his class. As data on these issues were brought into the class, Freire became a problem poser. In this capacity, Freire used the knowledge he and his students had produced around the generative themes to construct questions. (p.164-165)

Disagreements over the nature of truth and knowledge, the social construction of reality and the structure-agency dilemma are perhaps the most fundamental, and perhaps fundamentally unresolvable, dilemmas. Economists argue that social and economic inequality are an unavoidable consequence of unequal distribution of different capacities, effort and aspirations, and that some level of social inequality is good insofar as it encourages productivity. Critical theorists may respond that skills are also a social construct, and that individual efforts and aspirations are shaped by and mediated through a social reality shaped by dominant discursive structures. Critics of critical pedagogy argue against introducing biases and political agendas into the classroom. However, critical pedagogues identify education and schooling as an inherently value-laden activity: household ethics, morals, values, and ideologies explain why many parents and communities seek out religious education and schooling, or schooling associated with other values (e.g., prestige, accomplishment in sports or music, multi-cultural, multi-lingual schools or schools' promotion of political ideologies).

Ellsworth (1989) offers a critique of critical pedagogy, based on her experience of using the methods of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Ellsworth (1989) notes that “to the extent that our efforts to put the discourses of critical pedagogy into practice led us to reproduce relations of domination in our classroom, these discourses were “working through” us in repressive ways, and had themselves become vehicles of repression” (p. 298). Ellsworth’s experience leads her to argue against searching for a coherent narrative of repression and toward a post-structural understanding of “otherness.” Here, “otherness” is “moving-about.” Here identity is “nonessentialized” and ever-changing. Ellsworth states,

Minh-ha’s *moving about* refuses to reduce profoundly heterogeneous networks of power/desire/interest to any one a priori, coherent narrative. It refuses to know and resist oppression from any a priori line of attack, such as race, class, or gender solidarity. (p. 322)

Ellsworth's critique argues in favor of a post-structural understanding of knowledge; however it poses a problem in societies with histories of structural oppression made on the basis race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. In South Africa centuries of oppression based on "racial categories" call out for redress and justice. Alexander (2013) argues that too much emphasis on redress associated with "racial categories" will hinder efforts to build a new society based on democratic ideals and non-racialism. In a review of five books on education in post-apartheid South Africa, Spreen and Vally (2010a) argue that "much of the analysis of 'race'/ class/ gender/ poverty is devoid of discussions of local knowledges, understandings and constructions of these categories" (p. 442). Critical perspectives illuminate concepts (structure, agency, resistance and contestation) and potential actions which can support or limit social change. Education rights advocates often draw on critical perspectives as well as international conventions, norms and understandings of justice and human rights.

Right-based approaches

A human rights approach to development and education draws on the evolution of the UN system, theories of justice (e.g., the work of philosopher John Rawls), and a series of international legal conventions and declarations (McGrath, 2012a; Vally, 2013). The UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights states, "human rights are rights inherent to all human beings" (OHCHR, 2013).¹³ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that human rights are universal (they apply everywhere), egalitarian (they apply to everybody), and inalienable (they cannot be taken away) (UN, 1948). A rights approach to education identifies education as a human right in and of itself and as instrumental to the realization of other human rights. Drawing on the work of the late UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katerina Tomasevski, Vally (2013) notes,

a rights approach emphasizes rights to education, rights in education and rights through education and identifies the right to education as interconnected with the realization of other human rights....Any significant denial of the right to education involves a restriction of citizenship for those so denied, both in itself, and by impairing their capacity to engage in civil, economic and public life on the same terms as others. (p.2)

¹³ "What are human rights?" <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatareHumanRights.aspx> [accessed July 1, 2013]

Expanding the right to education has been realized through international conventions and declarations (e.g., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1966, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, and the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990), international campaigns and advocacy (e.g., UN agencies, the Global Campaign for Education, the Right to Education project efforts to promote EFA, compulsory education laws and adult education and prevent Child Labor) many of which are linked to progressive civil society organizations and coalitions (e.g., Action Aid, Global March Against Child Labor, Amnesty International, Open Society Foundations), research and analysis on right-to-education issues (e.g., marginalization, education laws, public financing of education), and theoretical and conceptual work articulating what the right to education means in policy and practice (Tomasevski, 2003). The right to free, compulsory, basic education is included in several constitutions, including in Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1966) states that “technical and professional education shall be made generally available, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that secondary education should be made “generally available and accessible to all” (Article 13).

The right to education is often summarized using the 4A’s framework created by Tomasevski. The 4A’s framework argues that states must ensure that education is available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable (Tomasevski, 2003). Availability means that the state must ensure that education is available to all up to a minimum age: schools must have adequate facilities, infrastructure, materials and staff for free compulsory quality education. Accessibility means that all people must be able to access education, regardless of race, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or national origin. Accessibility argues that special consideration must be given to vulnerable groups, including marginalized language groups, refugees, non-citizens, and children with physical and mental disabilities. Acceptability means that the curriculum and pedagogy must be relevant, non-discriminatory, and culturally appropriate and that teachers must respect human rights and create a safe environment for all. Adaptability means that education needs to respond to the changing needs and circumstances of children and society, such as children displaced by conflict and human and natural emergencies,

children in prison or in hospital care migration and nomadic and migrant populations (Right to Education project, 2013; Tomasevski, 2003; Vally, 2013). Vally (2013) notes “various legal instruments under international human rights law oblige the state as a duty-bearer to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the right to education,” including that the state “fulfill various legislative, budgetary, administrative, pedagogical and other steps to realize the right to education” (p.1). Promoting rights in school and linking the right to education with other fundamental human rights are central features of a rights approach to education.

Critiques of the right to education perspective wonder whether the state can be entrusted to ensure the right to education (given the existence of profound inequalities perpetuated through state structures), question the extent to which rights and equity should be privileged over quality or educational outcomes, and suggest that a rights-based approach is too expensive or impractical. Others note that a right to education lens does not focus on issues of economic competitiveness and preparation for world of work. To some, a right to education discourse, which focuses on the state (e.g., laws, financing, and protection) reflects a misguided expectation that states run by elite, self-interested, or corrupt politicians will effect change which harms influential constituencies. Alternatives to expecting the state to deliver on the right to education include supporting school choice (through vouchers, privatization or private schools for the poor) and promoting competition to improve school quality. Right to education advocates acknowledge the dilemma: state structures reproduce marginalization and oppression but also offer, perhaps, the most realistic avenue for ensuring the systemic expansion of human rights.

A second critique of the rights approach reflects a matter of degree to which the state should value equity and justice over other goals such as cognitive skills development and budget trade-offs. Many economists argue that the trade-offs between individual returns and externalities associated with education vary by level of education and that individuals should finance educational choices at higher levels of education. Should policy-makers choose quality improvements over expansion of access or dropout prevention (Banerjee & Rajan, 2010; Crouch 2005)? This concern reflects part of the debate in South Africa where DHET argues that it must simultaneously promote access expansion and quality improvement in FET colleges. Critics of this position question the

value of an expensive, high access, low-quality, low internal efficiency system (Grewer and Kraak as quoted in City Press, 2012; Taylor, 2011). A rights-approach may consider such questions as posing false choices – education, once established as a right is the responsibility of state. Contestation over rights, and rights-expansion, is a feature of modern states and international law. When (at what age, level, type of education) is the state’s obligation to ensure the right to education fulfilled? A rights framework provides a rationale for compulsory education laws, while also situating human development and education within a framework which privileges human rights, empowerment and agency, social justice, and democratic development.

Capabilities and ethical development

An *agency-focused capabilities approach* to human and global development places increasing the freedom to express human agency (for the promotion of human well-being) at the center of development efforts.¹⁴ The capabilities approach builds on a number of specific concepts to articulate its development vision: well-being, agency, human functioning, and human capability. In a capabilities framework, well-being is defined as the quality of a person’s being (e.g., good-health and happiness). *Agency* is expressed when individuals and groups act to “shape their own destiny.” Expressions of agency may include making decisions, helping others, and taking actions to effect individual or social change (Sen, 1999, as referenced in Crocker, 2008). Expression of agency is closely linked to values and objectives: an individual or group may act to effect change based on a particular value, interest, or objective. Agency may be, but is not always, used by individuals and groups to improve human well-being.¹⁵

The quality of a person’s well-being is determined by his or her functioning, meaning his or her state of existence, being, or doing. Functioning may include voluntary and involuntary activities and responses (e.g., listening, digestion, happiness, grief) and states of being based on prior experiences (e.g., becoming enlightened after meditation, engaging in higher-level cognitive activity, such as evaluation or analysis,

¹⁴ Crocker (2008) provides extensive and detailed discussion on the evolution of the capabilities approach and difference between two of the major thinkers, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. My conception of agency and capability aligns with that of Sen and Crocker.

¹⁵ Sen has called his approach “the freedom centered perspective on the ends and means of development” and “involves an overarching interest in the role of human beings ...in running their own lives and in using and expanding their freedoms” (Crocker, 2008).

after learning how to do so). Human functioning is based on capabilities, which precede functioning. Capabilities are the set of functionings available to an individual. Walker (2006, as referenced in McGrath, 2012a) defines capabilities thusly,

A capability is a potential functioning; the list of functionings is endless. It might include doings and beings such as being well nourished, having shelter and access to clean water, being mobile, being well-educated, having paid work, being safe, being respected, taking part in discussions with your peers, and so on. The difference between a capability and functioning is like one between an opportunity to achieve and the actual achievement, between potential and outcome. (p.627)

A capabilities perspective explicitly identifies the role of the social environment in expanding or constraining human agency and capability. Referencing Sen, Crocker (2008) notes,

Although agency “is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political, and economic opportunities available to us” (Sen 1999: xi-xii), not only do people have more or less freedom to decide, act, and make a difference in the world but social arrangements can also extend the reach of agency achievements and agency freedom. (p. 151)

Capabilities must be understood in terms of genuine opportunities available to people. One may be legally capable of becoming president or cognitively-prepared to succeed in college, but not have the capability. Becoming president or going to college may not be a genuine opportunity for lack of campaign finance or awareness and knowledge of the financial aid and the college application process. Crocker (2008) adds, “capabilities, as well as the activity of choosing, add something intrinsically, and not merely instrumentally valuable to a human life, namely, positive freedom in the sense of available and worthwhile options” (p. 169).

The focus of the capabilities approach on expanding human well-being and agency necessarily intersects with social life, politics, and the state. For Sen, the role of the state is not to impose some conception of the good life (e.g., such as in a paternalistic or dictatorial state) but to allow for each individual to achieve a minimum level of functioning to freely participate in society and express agency to improve well-being. A capabilities approach can be identified as valuing agency, human-centered and ethical

development, deliberative democracy, social justice, and positive social change (McGrath, 2012a; Walker, 2010).¹⁶

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum are recognized as leading figures in articulating the capabilities approach. While much of their work is concerned with poverty alleviation and the relationship of poverty to democracy and development, both argue that a core set of capabilities, including a *minimum level of education*, such as basic numeracy and literacy, is instrumental to achieving other capabilities.¹⁷ Based on the work of Sen and Nussbaum, an increasing number of education researchers are drawing on the capabilities approach as an alternative human development model (Powell, 2012 references Lumby & Morrison, 2009; Unterhalter, 2007; and Walker, 2006; Walker, 2008; and Walker, 2010). McGrath (2012a) argues that a capabilities approach offers a useful lens through which to understand the varied ways in which human potential can unfold and provides a framework which expands (rather than constricts) potential rationales of human development and expectations of education. Put another way, a capabilities approach offers a set of first principles (improving human agency and well-being) which conceptually ground education and human development discourse.¹⁸ From this set of first principles can be constructed “a more radical notion of learning for life” which may include education and learning for cultural understanding, spiritual development, leisure, care-giving, and community development.

Powell (2012) demonstrates the potential of a capabilities paradigm to expand our understanding of what education offers to human well-being and development. In an article on students enrolled in FET colleges in South Africa, Powell (2012) notes,

While students spoke of the skills and attitudes that prepare them for work and the qualifications required to continue into higher education, they spoke longer and with greater passion and emotion about the empowerment role played by the college in enabling respect, self-confidence and personal pride. (p. 650)

¹⁶ Crocker notes, “It is important to ask not only what it means for an individual’s life to go well or for a group to be doing well, which capabilities and functionings are most important, but also who should decide these questions, how they should do so, and who should act to effect change.”

¹⁷ Amartya Sen argues that attainment of basic literacy increases individual security, opportunity and freedom. Sen (2003, p. 22) notes, “Indeed, the first and most immediate contribution of successful primary education is a direct reduction of this extreme insecurity [illiteracy] – the certainty of leading a deprived and reduced life.”

¹⁸ Nussbaum and Walker and McLean (2010) move from “first principles” by identifying lists of capabilities required for human development or execution of professional responsibilities. Sen and Crocker argue that such lists should emerge from deliberative and democratic processes.

Drawing on the work of Appadurai, Powell concludes that among the students interviewed for her small case study, enrollment in FET college Courses developed their capability to aspire. Powell quotes Appadurai's argument that, "since the work of development and poverty reduction has everything to do with the future, it is evident that a deeper capacity to aspire can only strengthen the poor as partners in the battle against poverty" (Appadurai, 2004, as cited in Powell 2012, p. 651).

A capabilities approach has several features in common with a human rights approach: both place *agency* at the center of the human development discourse and acknowledge the inter-relationships between well-being, agency, and democratic discourse. Unlike a human rights or a critical perspective, a capabilities orientation may give less attention to the influence of power inequalities and efforts of struggle and redress. That human capabilities are socially constructed, understood as a combination of individual attributes and social conditions presents a dilemma for technical conceptions of education with an eye toward education production and measures of outcomes and efficiency. Powell (2012) identifies that further work on capabilities theorization could draw on the work of Dewey and Freire to better understand "capabilities expansion" as a social and dialectical process. McGrath (2012a) suggests that a capabilities perspective may be of limited value to the extent that VET policy seeks to meet the needs of industry or industrial policy. A capabilities approach may include the same sets of functionings /skills (e.g., selected cognitive, non-cognitive, and technical skills) promoted from a human capital or critical pedagogy perspective. Differences between these human development approaches are in the desired ends of human development and education: individual wealth and economic growth; illuminating and rupturing oppressive structures; and expanding human agency and well-being.

Other human development perspectives

This chapter does not offer space for introduction of the many other perspectives providing rationales for human development and education. I provide some brief sketches of other perspective in this paragraph. Development of national, religious or other identity is a facet of most education systems. Examples include education reform under the rule of Ataturk in Turkey and articulation of Christian National Education in

Afrikaner schools in South Africa. Post-colonial and black consciousness discourses promote the role of education in constructing a community identity and consciousness separate from received discourses privileging European knowledge and languages and exploitative colonial and capitalist structures. For Steven Biko, founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, “the idea of self-reliance and community work was not to solve the challenges of development. It was a confidence-building process to achieve the critical awareness to make a revolution” (Mngxitama, 2012). Out of critical social theory have emerged critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory and intersectionality, each of which expand on ideas of identity, structure, agency, resistance, and rupture in education and social life. McGrath (2012a) draws on the teachings of the Catholic Church to outline a perspective on *integrated human development* which rejects “market-state dialectic and [provides] a robust critique of both communism and capitalism as models of economic and social development” (p. 629). Integrated human development identifies work as a part of being human and a global public good, and vocation an integral part of humanity. Human dignity is central to an integrated human development perspective which identifies decent work as that which neither leads “to alienation or to the instrumentalization of the worker” (McGrath, 2012a, p. 629).

Perspectives on youth development

As indicated in the introduction, “Youth” as a subject of inquiry and policy interest has gained prominence in international development circles (UNESCO, 2012; USAID 2012; USAID 2013; World Bank, 2006). To put a fine point on it: the 2012 Global Monitoring Report is titled “Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work.” The youth lens draws on the above discourses and organizes them around the concepts of “youth,” “youth in society,” or “youth transitions.” Youth is commonly regarded as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood; a time of great physical, psychological and social change; and a period of great energy, enthusiasm, and creativity (USAID, 2012; World Bank, 2006). UNESCO identifies youth as individuals between the ages of 15-24, though several countries extend the age-bound of youth to 34 years old. Framing youth policy issues around the concept of “youth transitions,” the World Bank (2006) identifies five critical transitions made by youth to adulthood: learning, working, healthy

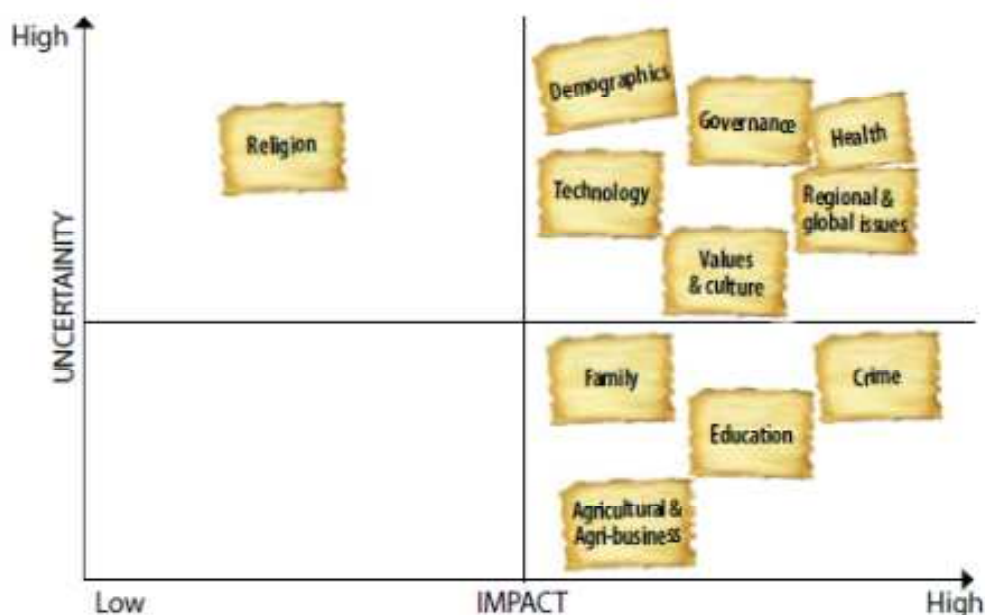
living, forming a family, and exercising citizenship. The report also identifies three strategies for policymakers to support effective youth transitions: expanding opportunities, developing youth capabilities, and providing second chances. The USAID *Youth in Development* policy (2011) echoes World Bank emphasis on youth transitions, with an emphasis on work-force development (e.g., jobs, skills development, entrepreneurship, and livelihoods) but also provides additional emphasis on post-conflict issues (e.g., re-integration and peace-building), democratic development (e.g., youth participation and inclusion), and efforts to reduce youth participation in criminal activity. In research on “youth futures” in Kenya, Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola (2011) take a different approach. Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola (2011) start with a set of social “driving forces” which they believe will shape the future and then work with youth to imagine possible futures and youth roles in shaping the future of Kenya. Table 1 identifies these two different perspectives of youth in development. To some extent both of these approaches align with Brofenbrenner’s ecological model which offers a socio-cultural understanding of influences on human development (Brofenbrenner, 1979).

Table 1: Youth Transitions; Youth in Society

Youth Transitions	Youth as a social shaping force / Areas for youth agency
<p><u>Youth Transitions (World Bank, 2006)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning after primary school ▪ Starting a productive working life ▪ Adopting a healthful lifestyle ▪ Forming a family ▪ Exercising citizenship <p><u>USAID (2012) adds / emphasizes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Democratic development ▪ Inclusion, voice, participation ▪ Post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building ▪ Avoidance of criminal activity 	<p><u>Future driving forces</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Culture ▪ Governance/participation ▪ Religion and values ▪ Agriculture ▪ Technology ▪ Education ▪ Family ▪ Demographics ▪ Urbanization ▪ Health ▪ Crime ▪ Global and regional issues ▪ Economy/ employment

What does a youth lens offer? Discourse on “youth transitions” and “youth in society” offer a broader conceptual frame than that offered by a frame bounded by concepts of schooling or education. Broader discourse can identify limits and deficiencies in education as currently conceived. Focus group respondents in Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola (2011) indicate that “education is without values” and that education, in the form of passing exams and getting into a good university, is seen as the path to the good life, measured in terms of material wealth. As identified in Figure 4 below, a broader lens identifies the extent to which education vis-à-vis other influences affect social change and offers opportunities to examine dialectical relationships between education and society. The “futuring” approach, by engaging youth in discourse concerning their development and agency in creating a future society, can move us toward a theory of praxis. One disadvantage of the youth lens is that in emphasizing the possibilities of youth agency it may also downplay structural explanations of poverty, inequality and exploitation.

Figure 4: Perceptions of different drivers of development (their impact and uncertainty) on the future (of Kenya)



Source: Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola, 2011, p. 50

The Delors Report

The differences and debates between the above perspectives on human development point to the difficulty in achieving consensus on public education policy.

Snyder (1999) summarizes this issue.

The education agenda has expanded dramatically over the years as societies entrust more and more responsibilities to vast and complicated curricula. There are many different interest groups in a society that is concerned about education. They promote different educational priorities, and greater consultation does not result in clarity of intents but rather in compromises and complexities. (p. 1)

These compromises and complexities are not to be ignored, nor is the presence of multiple and competing interests. For this research, I've identified few better frameworks than that presented in *Learning: The Treasure Within*, a 1996 report to UNESCO from the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century. It is frequently referred to as the Delors Report, in reference to the commission chair Jacques Delors. The Delors report (UNESCO, 1996) offers a normative framework for education which is broad enough to house many of the debates between different perspectives and lean enough to facilitate focused analysis. The report also comes from a perspective which acknowledges role of education in promoting and developing humanist values and identifies the inevitable tensions and dilemmas of social life in the modern world. The report argues that "choosing a type of education means choosing a type of society," and articulates its positionality thusly,

We must be guided by the Utopian aim of steering the world towards greater mutual understanding, a greater sense of responsibility and greater solidarity, through acceptance of our spiritual and cultural differences. Education, by providing access to knowledge for all, has precisely this universal task of helping people to understand the world and to understand others. (p. 34)

The Delors Report recognizes education as a social experience, a deliberate choice toward the construction of a desired society, and as offering the possibility of reducing poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression, and war. The report critiques development focused on economic growth, noting, "all-out economic growth can no longer be viewed as the ideal way of reconciling material progress with equity, respect for the human condition and respect for the natural assets that we have a duty to hand on in good condition to future generations" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 13).

UNESCO (1996) calls on education to support the empowerment of the total human person, and, lamenting the production of academic failure, argues that reform of secondary education is especially urgent. Referencing the Delors report, MacLean (2001) states that,

Young people, who are living in what for many is a turbulent, rapidly changing world, need values-oriented anchors, and the knowledge, skills and understanding that will enable them to find effective ways of coping with the tensions, pressures and contradictions that are apparent in their societies, and in their daily lives. (p. 43)

Table 2 identifies the four types of learning outlined in the Delors Report: Learning to Know (learning for the sake of learning, learning how to learn); Learning to Do (learning focused the development of particular skills, often considered in terms of workforce relevance and national economic development); Learning to Live Together (learning focused on understanding other people, the appreciation of interdependence and respecting pluralism, mutual understanding and peace); and Learning to Be (learning to develop the ethical, spiritual, and other self-regulating and self-understanding dimensions of the self). In arguing for “the necessary Utopia,” the commission places great emphasis on learning to live together, the moral and cultural dimensions of education, and learning to be.

Table 2: Types of learning

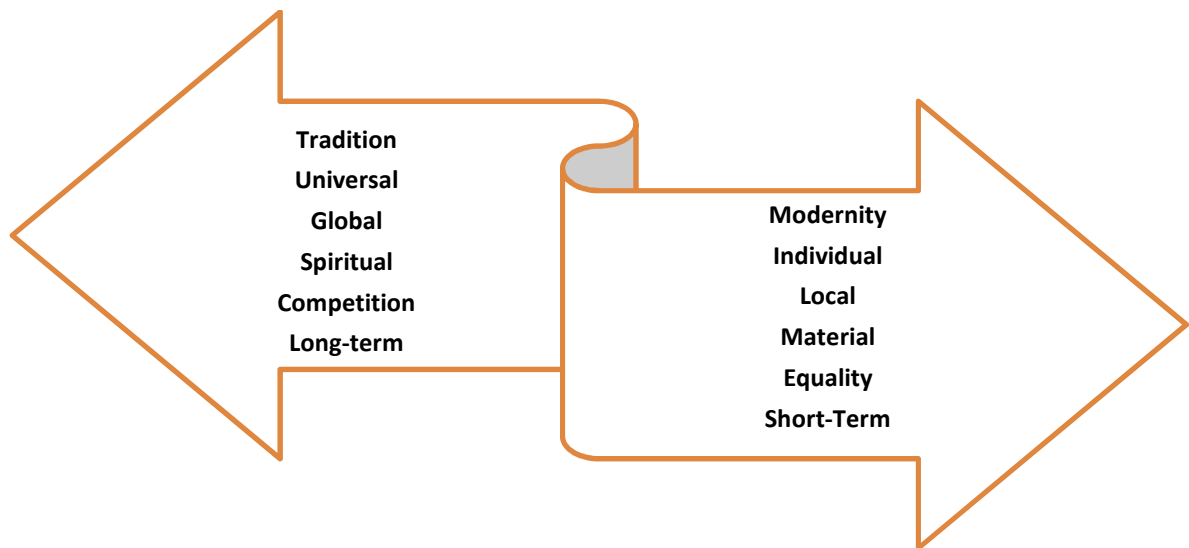
Types of Learning	Description
Learning to know	Combining a sufficiently broad general education with the possibility of in-depth work on a selected number of subjects. Developing the capacity for lifelong learning.
Learning to do	Learning a job or vocation. Learning to work; the acquisition of a competence that enables people to deal with a variety of situations, often unforeseeable, and to work in teams; with each other; to try things out.
Learning to be	Learning that develops one’s personality and to be able to act with autonomy, judgment and personal responsibility. Self-knowledge. Other talents: reasoning power, imagination, physical ability, aesthetic sense, the aptitude to communicate with others, leadership.
Learning to live together	Learning to live together, by developing an understanding of other people (their history, traditions and spiritual values) and an appreciation of interdependence - carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts - in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace.

Source: UNESCO, 1996

Evident in the types of learning proposed, the commission identifies several tensions with which societies must grapple as they make their way in the modern world. Figure 5 identifies some of these tensions. The Delors Report argues that these are not tensions to be resolved in some way, but to be held in balance as youth consider their individual and collective futures. Tensions include striking a balance between tradition and modernity; the spiritual and the material; and the global and the local. Education is recognized as playing a critical role in providing the knowledge, experiences, skills and forums needed to thoughtfully consider these tensions and develop the autonomy, judgment, and sense of responsibility to act. Linking places of learning to youth development, the Delors Report (1996) notes:

At a time when these young people are struggling with the problems of adolescence, when they feel, in a sense, mature but are in fact still immature, when instead of being carefree they are worried about their future, the important thing is to provide them with places where they can learn and discover, to give them the wherewithal to think about their future and prepare for it, and to offer them a choice of pathways suited to their abilities. (p. 30-31)

Figure 5: Tensions with which youth and adults must grapple



Source: UNESCO, 1996

Reflections on human development perspectives

The previous section offered an overview of some of the leading perspectives used to justify state support of human and youth development in global and national discourses. The section includes a description and critique of four perspectives on human development: human capital formation, critical theory, critical pedagogy, right-based approaches, and capabilities and ethical development. I also identify other human development perspectives. In this section I offer some reflections based on my reading of the different perspectives and their influence on secondary education. I offer several reflections below.

- *No neutrality. There is no neutral perspective from which to argue for a particular construction of secondary education.* Each human development perspective draws on a particular philosophical foundation, articulates a particular set and understanding of socially-constructed values, and draws on particular assumptions and methods to create new knowledge. In their effort to explain reality, theories also have the power to become yet another discursive practice (Carr, 2006).
- *Different perspectives may privilege similar values (e.g., equity, justice, efficiency), but vary greatly in their interpretation of and priority given to these values.* All perspectives value, in some way, improving human well-being, but have different definitions of well-being, different ways of measuring well-being, different constructs as to how human well-being is improved, and different understandings of the relationship between individual and social “well-being.” Like “well-being,” the value of equity is privileged in several perspectives, but defined in different ways and valued for different reasons. Is equity defined in terms of adequacy? Per capita funding? Unequal treatment of unequals (e.g., providing additional support to children who are gifted or differently-abled)? Is equity in education valued because of its association with economic growth and social cohesion or because of social agreements to uphold values of fairness and justice? In conflicts over efforts to promote quality and equity which value does a

particular perspective privilege? Whose interests are served in privileging one value over another?

- *Existing constructions of education and schooling reflect a messy negotiation of conceptualizations, values and interests amid unequal power relations.* Different interests propose education as a means toward other goals and as an end in and of itself. Expectations of education vary: Education is expected to support progress toward particular social or economic policy objectives; education is expected to prepare countries for an increasingly competitive knowledge economy; education is a right designed to limit state or corporate influence on individual and community liberties, including the rights and social participation of disadvantaged groups; education is a means for improving self-knowledge, conveying folklore and tradition and building community; and education is a way to create new knowledge, exploring our world and what lies beyond it.
- *The effects of education can be multiple, contradictory and unequally shared, and are mediated by the “how” and “what” of education, as well as the context.* Education can be socially reproductive or socially transformative. Often upper secondary and vocational education is purposed toward workforce development: work may be exploitative, a means for the expression of human dignity and solidarity, or a process which allows for capability expansion and thus a richer expression of human potential. How are secondary learners taught to understand the world of work, career and vocation, or capitalism? Education may support an increase in global consumption and environmental degradation while at the same time promoting thrift and environmental protection.
- *Our understandings of education are dialectically related to our constructions of social reality, including of the community, the economy and society.* Perspectives of education are often informed by the philosophical lenses and analytical tools used to understand the relationship between education and something else. Many researchers like to ask, “What is the relationship between education, poverty and

inequality?” and “What is the relationship between education, jobs and growth?” Is education designed in such a way as to reduce poverty or unemployment? What type of education? What else is needed (e.g., land reform, access to credit and social protection, public jobs programs, economic restructuring)? Should education be shaped around addressing the problem of youth unemployment? The success of the education system may be measured by patents, job placement, spiritual growth, student development of social or profit-making enterprises, individual excellence, development of compliant workers, or the construction of shared identities.

- *The debate between the different human development perspectives underestimates the extent to which educational programs can accommodate multiple, overlapping and conflicting purposes and values.* The human development perspectives discussed in the previous section could be described as “conceptual” packages for sets of values – which may be expressed through the process of education and understandings of learning and knowledge. The concepts of “learning” and “knowledge” are broader than the theoretical constructs which make use of them, but, by themselves, have less explanatory power and rhetorical influence.¹⁹ As discursive practices and theories, they offer a coherent framework through which to argue for a particular type of education. However, should we start with theories or with values? An alternative starting point to the construction of education could be: “What is our vision for the world we want?” and “What approaches to education and learning are most likely to help us create that world?” (CERT, 2013, p. 1).

- *Troublingly, most debates over human development don’t necessarily include learning for the sake of learning or personal enjoyment or practicing a skill for similar reasons as valuable ends in and of themselves* (Douse, 2013).

¹⁹ Personal communication with Enver Motala.

My perspective

In this chapter, I argue that all human development discourse is based on a subjectively selected set of values and that leading ideas from whatever discourse is dominant are integrated into social structures, reproduced, and transformed through social interactions, and evolve over time. In our historical moment, the dominant discourse provides a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between individuals, education, the economy, and society. This discourse is then enacted through institutions and policies in society and social interactions and is drawn on by individuals in thought and action. In South Africa, secondary and FET college education is conceived of through a human capital lens. Instrumentally, education is tasked with providing skills for the workforce and the production of more PhDs with a science and technology focus. Curricula are refined or reformed to better meet market defined skills and demands. From a process perspective, education practitioners focus on improving NSC pass rates and NCV throughput. Some of the issues which emerge in this discourse include accountability (e.g., testing, school management, and management of teachers) and improving teachers' subject matter knowledge. Issues of pervasive inequality and structural disadvantage receive a lot of attention in South Africa. State-led interventions focus on addressing the unequal distribution of resources and providing test preparation support for learners in disadvantaged communities, among other things. Such interventions appear insufficient given the multiple disadvantages learners in marginalized communities face and the persistence in the unequal distribution of resources (e.g., teachers, textbooks, and lab equipment) and learning opportunities (e.g., courses, extra-curricular activities, and peer learning).

As stated in the introductory chapter, I argue in favor of a different human development perspective. This perspective draws on critical social theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model to argue that learners' exist in a constructed social reality laden with unequal power and learn in a socio-cultural environment shaped by direct and indirect influences. This perspective identifies promoting human well-being and ethical global development as important goals of education. My understanding of elements which foster human development draws on constructivist, critical, and capabilities perspectives. Elements needed for human development include development

of self-knowledge, development of socially-valued knowledge and skills, grounding one's education in a particular set of values, and development of learners' critical perspective and agency. One of the most important expectations of education should be that it provides space for deciding what we value individually and in communities, acting on our values, and regularly critiquing our values and actions with reference to our social context. These elements of human development are not elaborated on with a set of prescriptions (i.e., self-knowledge means X, Y, and Z), but instead are meant to offer a set of first principles from which a construction of secondary education can be made through democratic participation. This stance aligns with the way in which Sen and Crocker (as opposed to Nussbaum) present a capabilities perspective. I argue that this approach allows for a more holistic, democratic, and contextualized understanding of human development in society which values the promotion of human well-being and ethical global development.

The next chapter provides discussion on critical political economy and how a political economy framework can provide insights into perspectives which seek to explain the relationships between education, work, and society.

Chapter 3: Political economy and skills

What is political economy?

Political economy is a contested term. Political economists draw on a range of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives (including those of political science, economics and sociology) to make sense of the distribution of power and the influence of power formations (e.g., political parties, unions, social movements, business interests, and dominant ideologies) in society. I start this section by differentiating between a few different types of political economy: rational-choice political economy, neoliberal political economy, and critical political economy. In subsequent sections I discuss different conceptualizations of skills and the dialectic between political economy and skills.

Rational choice political economists draw on rational choice theory associated with political science and economics and on a market economy paradigm to explain political phenomena. Such phenomena include principal-agent relationships (including rent-seeking and neo-patrimonial behavior) and interest-group politics. According to Rodrik (2013), in a rational choice political economy paradigm, “politicians became income-maximizing suppliers of policy favors; citizens became rent-seeking lobbies and special interests; and political systems became marketplaces in which votes and political influence are traded for economic benefits” (blog post).²⁰ Compared to other political economy perspectives, the interest of rational choice political economists is explaining “who gains and who loses from the status quo” and the power of interest groups play an important role in explaining which policies are enacted (or not) in the political arena.²¹

Like rational choice political economists, neoliberal economists, who also self-identify as political economists, situate their analysis from within a market economy paradigm. However, unlike a rational choice perspective, neoliberal economists are more strident in their conception of capitalism as “both efficient and equitable,” they argue that the problems of capitalism are “relatively minor” and they identify government interference with market forces to be “the culprit” of many of the problems facing

²⁰ <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/how-economists-killed-policy-analysis-by-dani-rodrik>

²¹ Van de Walle (2001) in *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis* draws on a rational choice political economy perspective to explain the persistence of rent-seeking and neo-patrimonial behaviors in African states.

society” (Klees, 2014). Both neoliberal and rational choice political economy perspectives are drawn on to analyze education systems and identify areas for reform. Based on their perspective, neoliberal political economists situate their understanding of education using a market-framework and, thus, are more likely to privilege market-oriented solutions. For example, Chubb and Moe (1990) argue against “the one best system” of schooling by identifying it as a monopoly which undermines efficiency associated with perfect markets. Neoliberal economists offer instead market-oriented solutions such as private schools, vouchers, and charter schools (Klees, 2014). A recent publication commissioned by DfID, “A rigorous review of the political economy of education systems in developing countries,” by Kingdon et al. (2014) offers a recent example of both types of analysis. In this publication, a rational choice perspective is drawn on to identify powerful interest groups which may promote or act against a particular vision for education reform and a neoliberal perspective is drawn on to emphasize the harmful influence of teachers’ unions and the extent of inefficiency of public provision of education. The publication then proceeds to identify possibilities for improving efficiencies through market-oriented reforms.

While a rational choice theory offers a framework for analyzing the influence of different interests on policy, Rodrik (2013) argues that it is “replete with unstated assumptions” about the different and varied ways ideas and ideology influence “political systems.” A critical political economy perspective makes explicit some of these assumptions, and goes further, by arguing, in the words of Vally (2013) that,

The idea that socially fragmented and divided societies can, without reference to the problem of entrenched power, deal with the impact and social reality of structural, personal and social inequality and its implications for freedom and justice is both naive and disingenuous if not deliberately misleading. (p. 1)

I position myself within the critical political economy school of thought and define political economy as *the study of relationships between power formations, discursive practices, and the social distribution of resources*. Unlike rational choice and neoliberal political economists, which accept a market paradigm and capitalist structures as part of a natural world order, a critical political economist will recognize the extent to which capitalist structures influence power relations, dominant discursive practices, and the social distribution of resources. A critical political economist may also recognize other

social structures (e.g., patriarchy, colonialism and neocolonialism, racism and privileged languages) which influence the unequal distribution of social power and, with it, structuralized marginalization. For example, later on in this chapter I will offer a critique of the “skills” discourse which is framed in part by a critique of capitalist structures and neoliberal policy discourse which influence the social construction of “skill.”

What does a critical political economy lens offer? In this historical moment in South Africa, which still appears to be somewhat in thrall to neoliberal economic ideology (e.g., the National Development Plan 2030, the New Growth Path, and the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training), a critical political economy analysis identifies the influence of the dominant discourses on conceptions of education and the practice of education policy, and of the relationship of education to the economy and society. The first and perhaps most important contribution of this political economy lens is that it allows us to recognize the influence of capitalism in the ordering of society. Structural features of capitalism include the valorization of profit and competition and a belief in efficient markets as arbiters of value. The privileging of profit has implications on poverty, unemployment, and inequality. A profit motive places downward pressure on workers’ wages, incentivizes the maintenance of a pool of unemployed workers, encourages the increased use of cheap labor (casual workers, temporary labor, immigrant labor, unprotected labor, and outsourcing of labor), and incentivizes displacing workers with technology. All of these features are present in South Africa, and indeed in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In spite of the official dismantling of racial capitalism policy of the apartheid state, official unemployment in South Africa stands at 35% in 2014, the same rate as in 1994, with black South Africans continuing to be the most likely to be unemployed (Stats SA, 2014). Several analyses have articulated the democratic transition in South Africa as one associated with “changing class.” A large number of black South Africans have joined the South African middle and upper classes in the past two decades, however, the vast majority of black South Africans live in poor and working class conditions.

Capitalist discourse also provides particular explanations for the persistence of poverty and inequality, privileges individualistic (as opposed to structural and collective) explanations of and solutions to social issues, and is silent on some of the dilemmas

facing an increasingly industrializing and consumption-oriented global society. To summarize, a neoliberal discourse is blind to the influence of power structures and dominant discursive practices which reinforce marginalization (e.g., access to better jobs and social resources) of historically disadvantaged groups. A neoliberal discourse blames skills deficiencies or mismatches, or individual laziness, as opposed to structural or macro-economic factors as the cause of unemployment, and it does not question the logic of incentivizing ever-increasing consumption (as opposed to environmental sustainability or global peace) as an important developmental goal.

Critics of critical political economists may express consternation at the extent to which critical political economists ground their analysis in a critique of the capitalist ordering of society. Sorry. But, global capitalism plays a significant role in shaping the world in which we live. If we lived in a different time, place, or historical moment, we could consider how other organizing frameworks influence the distribution of power, influence, and resources in society. We could consider hunter-gatherer societies (e.g., American Indian, San, or Maori communities) or feudal societies (e.g., ancient Egypt or the Holy Roman Empire). In this age, often we look to and compare advanced capitalist societies. I offer these comparisons to argue that complex social and economic relationships do not operate independent of socially agreed on rules and mores. Of course, sometime “social agreement” is coerced through the threat of violence.

What do we mean by skills?

This section seeks to briefly interrogate the concept of skills. In a review of the skills discourse, King and Palmer (2008) note, “unavoidable overlapping and complementarity of meanings for skill have sometimes proved an obstacle rather than facilitated analysis and evaluation” (p. 8). Of the skills reports published by the McKinsey Global Institute, the OECD and UNESCO in 2012, Lolwana (2013) notes, “one can easily see that there is no unanimity in the way the term ‘skills’ is used in these three documents” (p. 11). King and Palmer (2010) acknowledge the difficulty of tracking EFA Goal 3 because of lack of consensus on skills.²² Since the middle of the aughts, the

²² EFA Goal 3 is “Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.”
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/efa-goals/>

discourse on and conceptualization of skills has broadened. The importance of “skills” and “skills development” is, to use a term from advertising, a glittering generality. It is important to ask a number of questions: How do we define skills? What skills are we talking about? Who decides which skills are important? Whose interests should skills development serve? This section discusses these issues.

“Typing” skills. Notable in the skills discourse have been efforts to define or type skills. The UNESCO 2012 Global Monitoring Report identifies three skills types: foundational, transferrable, and technical and vocational skills (UNESCO, 2012). Foundational skills include functional literacy and numeracy; transferable skills are interpersonal skills (e.g., teamwork and communication), higher-level cognitive skills (e.g., problem-solving) and attitudinal or non-cognitive “skills” such as motivation, self-confidence, leadership, responsibility and aspiration. UNESCO (2012) notes, “people need these [transferrable] skills to be able to adapt to different work environments and so improve their chances of staying in gainful employment” (p. 14). Technical and vocational skills are defined in terms of technical know-how related to particular industries, jobs and vocations. King and Palmer (2008) argue for the inclusion of “Life Skills,” which may include “range of skills that all learners need to navigate their way through life” and promote sustainable living, including knowledge of sexuality, disease, drugs and nutrition, navigating relationships and intimacy, and knowledge of environmental issues” (p. 24). Other publications distinguish between cognitive, non-cognitive, and technical (or sector specific) skills (Adams, 2011; Burnett & Jayaram 2012). According to Adams (2011, p. 1) “cognitive skills are the basic mental abilities we use to think, study, and learn. ...Non-cognitive skills in turn refer to personality traits and behaviors” (p. 1). Other publications identify many other “types” of skills, including behavioral skills, soft skills, employability skills, entrepreneurial skills, 21st century skills, and knowledge economy skills (see Table 3).²³

²³ Burnett and Jayaram (2012) provide a recent iteration of the skills discussion. King (2008) notes that a skills GMR could end up tracking the following skills: core, life, work, soft, technical and vocational, high, low, and behavioral skills.

Table 3: Types of Skills

UNESCO (2012)	Adams (2012)	World Bank (2005)	Other types
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foundational ▪ Transferrable ▪ Technical <p><i>King (2012) adds</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive ▪ Non-cognitive ▪ Technical 	<p>Metacognitive skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning to think ▪ Learning to learn <p>Job skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expert thinking ▪ Complex Communication ▪ Routine cognitive tasks ▪ Routine manual tasks ▪ Non-routine manual tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Behavioral ▪ Soft ▪ Employability ▪ Entrepreneurial ▪ 21st Century ▪ Knowledge economy ▪ ICT

Drilling down. Many efforts have been made to elaborate on different sub-sets of skills. Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy includes six cognitive processes (Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating) and four knowledge dimensions (Factual, Conceptual, Procedural, and Metacognitive). Each process and dimension can be further disaggregated (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Typing of non-cognitive skills may be branched along intra-personal (e.g., self-regulation and self-knowledge) and interpersonal skills (e.g., social awareness and leadership). In a presentation for ETS, Payne and Kyllonen (2012) offer a recent example of a market-driven effort to type and assess non-cognitive skills (see bibliography for more detail). While the skills discourse shows some heterogeneity, there is a pretty clear consensus of the value placed on foundational skills (e.g., functional numeracy and literacy) and a small number of higher level cognitive skills (e.g., critical thinking and problem solving); the growing interest in non-cognitive skills as well as skills, attitudes, and behaviors seen as improving employability (even if there is some diversity in the understanding of what these skills are); and the sense that some bodies of knowledge and skill sets (e.g., ICT, science, and math) are to be valued over others.

There are several critiques of the skills discourse. The concept of “skill” itself is contested. Tilly (1998) argues that skills are a social construct and that often skills are defined and valued in ways which serve the interest of capital. Allais (2012) quotes Tilly (1988) at length.

As a historical concept, skill is a thundercloud: solid and clearly bounded when seen from a distance, vaporous and full of shocks close up. The commonsense notion—that “skill” denotes a hierarchy of objective individual traits—will not stand up to historical scrutiny; skill is a social product, a negotiated identity. Although knowledge, experience, and cleverness all contribute to skill, ultimately skill lies not in characteristics of individual workers, but in relations between workers and employers; a skilled worker is one who is hard to replace or do without, an unskilled worker one who is easily substitutable or dispensable. (p. 634-635)

Here “skill” is recognized as operating in a discursive relationship with understandings of education, work and society. Context gives value to skills. And in a context framed in a human capital or productivist paradigm, it is skills which service the economy and capital which are valued.

A second critique is that the “skills discourse” narrows our understanding of what education can offer. Skill is but one facet of “knowledge” and “learning” and separate from “value” (see Table 4). A skill focus is an application focus, however, the pursuit of knowledge and learning may have no foreknowledge of application and discussion on values (what is valued, how values are developed and transmitted) may come before discussion on application.

Table 4: Defining skill, knowledge, learn, value

Skill	Knowledge	Learn	Value (s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The ability to do something well; expertise ➤ A particular ability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Gain or acquire knowledge of or skill in (something) by study, experience, or being taught 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something ➤ Principles or standards of behavior; one’s judgment of what is important in life

With respect to Vocational Education and Training (VET), citing Winch (2011), Allais (2012) identifies skills “a fragmenting rather than integrating concept” (p. 636) which turns jobs into a set of labor processes, narrowing our understanding of “vocation”

and purposes of education. McGrath (2012a) echoes this assessment. Efforts to resolve some of these dilemmas return us to a model of VET where “vocation” is understood holistically including specific technical, cognitive, and non-cognitive skills associated with professional ethics, values, knowledge, and experiences (Allais, 2012; McGrath, 2012a). A third critique, alluded to earlier, is that a skills discourse is silent on structural inequalities, labor market rigidities and economic policies (which perpetuate poverty and inequality, unemployment and or job-loss), and the influence of improving social protection and services on job growth (King, 2010). These critiques of the skills discourse explicitly identify how political economy issues, issues of power inequality, influence our understandings and valuing of education and skills. The next section identifies some of the dialectics between political economy and the education and skills discourse.

A dialectic between political economy of education and skills

A political economy of education and skills is necessary power and ideology influence social constructions of “education”, “education systems,” and “skills.” A political economy of education and skills points to some of the conceptual and practical limitations of the dominant discourse, and thereby suggests possible points of rupture and social change in education. Put simply, a critical political economist argues that supply-side skills development cannot address, alone, the larger problems of inequality in society. Further, a critical political economist may argue that a focus on technocratic education solutions, absent political change may only serve to reproduce inequalities in society.

In trying to articulate a political economy of skill in the United Kingdom, Lloyd and Payne (2010) question whether government policy to support the UK’s transition to a “high skill” economy is aligned with the existing UK economy (e.g., the strategies UK businesses use to compete globally). They conclude that the UK is, in general, a low skill, low-wage economy and that “providing simply more or better education and training to individuals has been recognized as failing to deal with the fundamental difficulties of [transforming] a low-skill economy” (p. 375). Referencing the case of South Africa, Vally and Motala (2014) argue,

A nation's competitive advantage in the global economy is often based on workers' disadvantage. The kind of training which would foster more democratic forms of work organisation and address developmental issues will not necessarily be the same as that which would increase competitiveness. (draft abstract)

Lloyd and Payne identify a role for industrial policy and protective trade policy to create demand for high-skills, high wage jobs and conclude by arguing that “locating issues of class, conflict and power at the centre of the skills debate, forces a confrontation with the nature and scale of the political challenges that surround any project that realistically aims to shift the economy onto some high-skills, high-wage trajectory” (p. 384).

In “The End of Middle Class Work, Collins (2013) argues, more apocalyptically, that “technological displacement of the middle class will bring the downfall of capitalism, in places where it is now dominant, before the 21st century is over” (p.33). Collins’ analysis argues we are in the early stages of “the computerization of middle class labor,” a second wave of technological displacement (the first being the displacement of working class labor by industrialization). In such an economy, we see labor shift toward high-skills occupations, a small number of middle class and semi-skilled jobs and a large number of jobs in the services sector. He notes that “it is implausible that in the future most persons will be scientists or skilled technicians. Indeed, the biggest area of job growth in rich countries has been low-skilled service jobs, where it is cheaper to hire human labour than to automate” (Autor & Dorn, 2011 as cited in Collins, 2013, p. 18). In Collins’ envisioned future, structural unemployment rises to 50%, then to 70%. The post-financial crisis rise in youth unemployment in many OECD countries hints at this dystopian future where even in countries with high levels of educational attainment, there also exist high rates of youth unemployment. Several studies in sub-Saharan Africa point to high levels of graduate unemployment. The dialectic between education and competitive access to work has led many to write about qualification inflation in developed and developing countries (Collins, 2013; Dore, 1976). Competition for ‘secure’, professional and high-skill jobs leads to increased demand for high quality secondary education and access to higher education. In terms of competition, dominant groups generally have a competitive advantage as they have historical advantages, wealth, social/cultural capital, and influence the construction of dominant discursive practices.

In South Africa, the broad unemployment rate remains unchanged over two decades. During the same period, the share of the labor force in skilled work has increased by four percent, while the share of the labor force in semi-skilled and low-skilled labor has realized slight decreases (see Table 5). During this period, the number of jobs in South Africa grew by 6 million, about enough to keep up with labor force growth. In terms of job growth, growth in public sector jobs has outpaced job growth in all other sectors (Stats SA ,2014). Collins identifies growth in public sector jobs and expansion of access to higher education as hidden Keynesian measures which, while they can relieve unemployment, are not sustainable long term unemployment reduction strategies. Lloyd and Payne (2010) and Collins (2013) both argue that the answer to the question “what skills are valued?” depend on our acceptance of a capitalist world order, socially-drawn agreements (e.g., Is there an industrial policy? Is there a protective trade policy? Is economic globalization inevitable?), and ongoing technological change amid population growth.

Table 5: Share of Labor Force in South Africa 1994 and 2014

Year	Low Skilled	Semi-Skilled	Skilled
1994	32%	47%	21%
2014	29%	46%	25%

Source: Stats SA, 2014

Dissecting the discourse on “abysmal quality” and “skills mismatches.” The discourse on skills, while grounded in a paucity of empirical data, operates as an influential discursive practice. The problems of sluggish economic growth, declining international competitiveness, and the persistence of unemployment are laid at the doorstep of education. A recent publication by ASCD (2014) disabuses the assumption that test scores show a correlation with productivity growth and economic growth in the United States. It notes,

The average scores of 17-year-old students taking the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) long-term trend reading and math tests have remained within a 10-point span since the tests were first administered in 1971 and 1978, respectively, yet the nation’s productivity and gross domestic product (GDP) have steadily increased over the same period. (p. 1)

Put simply, while test scores have remained flat for twenty years, productivity and economic growth in the U.S. have realized significant gains. The trend in the NAEP could be considered by some as an accomplishment in and of itself as U.S. classrooms have become increasingly ethnically and linguistically diverse over the past two decades and inequality has increased. In *Education, Economy and Society* (2014), Vally and Motala draw on extensive global and South African data to correct reductive assumptions which associate education and skills development with economic growth. Like Klees (2014), Vally and Motala then question the logic of “maximization”, that is, the logic of promoting ever-increasing consumption, as a developmental goal.

Skills mismatches. In addition to blaming education quality and insufficient educational attainment for economic problems, the dominant discourse suggests that a scarcity of skills (demanded by the market) or a mismatch between the skills provided in educational settings and skills demanded by the economy are to blame for high levels of poverty and unemployment. However, many prominent economists argue that, in the years following the global financial crisis, it has been low demand for workers, not skills gaps, which explain the persistently high levels of unemployment. In a critique of a “scarce skills” list recently published by South Africa’s Department of Higher Education and Training, DHET, Ngcwangu and Balwanz (2014) note,

That the existence of a ‘skills gap’ is the main cause for unemployment or at least a main contributory factor to joblessness is now accepted by many as the ‘gospel’ explanation of South Africa’s employment challenges. All other factors, particularly exogenous economic factors, have tended to be treated as secondary to this fundamental problem. (p.15)

Treat (2014) and Treat and Motala (2014) identify over a dozen factors, unrelated to education and skills, which contribute to pervasive unemployment in South Africa. While Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)²⁴ in South Africa have been mandated to create ‘scarce skills’ lists, the Manufacturing and Engineering SETA (merSETA), prefers to use the term ‘priority skills,’ noting,

²⁴ In brief, SETAs are industry bodies with a mandate and funding from government to strengthen links between institutions of education and industries. They provide training and are expected to facilitate workforce transition. I do not discuss Sector Education and Training Authorities in this dissertation.

Since 2012 industry has no longer unanimously supported the concept of ‘scarce skills’: Because of the very limited recovery from the economic recession, and the increasing challenges facing companies competing against imports, the demand for new skills has dropped to levels only slightly higher than those required to cover replacement demand. (merSETA, 2013, p. xxx)

Ngcwangu and Balwanz (2014) conclude with a statement on the extent to which discourse on skills gaps, scarce skills, and skills mismatches paint a distorted picture of the employment reality in South Africa. They write,

When we compare unemployment data with vacancy data – we see issues of mismatch and scarcity in a different light. [In one fiscal year] identified job vacancies are equal to about one percent of the number of unemployed workers and number of terminations is an order of magnitude greater than the number of vacancies. (p.16)

What is certainly clear is that filling the 60,000 vacancies (determined by the Department of Labour) or the 19,000 projected vacancies projected by merSETA, in short responding to market identified vacancies, is a totally inadequate policy response, if in fact government policy seeks to respond to the needs of the over seven million unemployed and discouraged workers in South Africa. (p. 17)

Klees (2014) adds a further critique of mismatch, arguing that vocational skills, which are often context-specific, are generally best taught on the job. In many countries, work-integrated learning and work-placement provide opportunities for youth to learn vocational skills. However, in the present environment, practical and vocational training is offered on site at FET colleges, in part due to the professed insufficiency of the number of places for on-the-job training. Notably, large numbers of NATED students are unable to fulfill their degree requirements because of the same challenge: the limited number of work-placement opportunities (DHET, 2014). Given the limited number of work-placement opportunities for youth enrolled in FET colleges, it is worth asking how many of these youth, once they complete their education, will transition to the limited number of available jobs. Vally and Motale (2014), Wedekind (2014), and Treat (2014) provide extensive discussion on, and a critique of the “mismatch” discourse. The next chapter brings us back to secondary education.

Chapter 4: Global discourses on secondary education

This chapter starts with a brief history of secondary education and is followed by sections defining what we mean by secondary education today and identifying trends in secondary education, globally, and in sub-Saharan Africa. Constructions and expectations of secondary education have changed over time. In the present day, secondary education continues to be defined in terms of “academic” preparation for tertiary education, although there is increasing interest in preparing a subset of youth for entry into the world of work or further vocational training.

Secondary education – a very brief history

While I will not attempt to offer a thorough account of the history of secondary education, I think it is important to give some account of the diversity and history of traditions in secondary education. I offer the below not as a complete history and I do not seek to imply that historical trends are causally related to the present day construction of secondary education. Rather, I seek to show the extent to which philosophy, values, and society shape, and are shaped, by the educational systems we construct.

Education plays a central role in Confucian conceptions of the relationship between individual and society and saw an essential role of education as that of supporting the implementation of effective governance. The imperial examination system, established during the Sui Dynasty (581 – 618 A.D.), was designed to support the selection of the Shi class: the scholar-official class. Lin and Zha (2012, p. 3) note that Confucian education stressed the importance of cultivating “holistic abilities, through reading classics, working on arts, poetry and essays.” Education tested learners’ proficiency in the Six Arts (music, archery, horsemanship, arithmetic, writing, and knowledge of the rituals and ceremonies of both public and private life) and later on was extended to include the Five Studies (military strategies, civil law, revenue and taxation, agriculture, and geography).

Drawing on the philosophical traditions of ancient Greece and Medieval Rome, educators in medieval Europe organized studies along the *Trivium*, composed of grammar, rhetoric and logic, and the *Quadrivium*, composed of arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy (Tuchman, 1978). The Catholic Church provided religious training to aspirants of various religious orders and vocational training occurred through

apprenticeships. In these cases, as well as in others, advanced education was available to learners from elite populations, presumably destined, for elite positions in society.

As in other societies, education in Islamic societies and in traditional African societies was heterogeneous. However, in both traditions, the purpose of education was embedded in religious or spiritual belief systems. In Ghana, the work of traditional *kente* weavers is related to the messages conveyed through different fabric designs (e.g., the design “to err is human” counsels others to exhibit patience or forgiveness). Institutions of Islamic education may offer instruction in linguistic, Qur’anic and philosophical studies, the latter which may include history, medicine, and non-Islamic philosophy (Regan, 2004). The colonization of many areas in sub-Saharan Africa by European powers also influenced the construction of education in many to be constituted nation-states in sub-Saharan Africa. Here education was identified as a civilizing, Christianizing, and elite-forming (and subjugating) process where, often, a small number of people in the indigenous population were given access to education and directed to lower level civil service and management positions in the colonial economy (Weis, 1979).

The industrial revolution, among other things, played a role influencing state efforts to massify enrollment in education and emphasize teaching and learning focused on modern languages and technical and scientific subjects. Holsinger and Cowell (2000, p. 15) note, “from the nineteenth century to the Second World War, the curriculum at the secondary level began to encompass more subjects and became more specific...emphasis on philosophy, divinity, classical languages and ancient history began to wane, and was replaced with modern languages and literature, modern history, and scientific and technological subjects.” They make the distinction between the United States, which emphasized the development of the comprehensive school (which offered an increasingly diverse set of students a diverse array of subject offerings) and the English system, which focused on students studying three subjects for ‘A’ level exams. In both cases however, a number of industrial-era practices became prevalent in schooling: use of timetables, organizing students’ participation in a number of classes, grade levels, and tracking. In the United States schools diversified to such an extent as to offer home economics, drivers’ education, as well as an array of vocational subjects (e.g., small engine repair, carpentry, and metal work). World Bank (2005) discuss in further detail the extent to

which English and French secondary schooling models were transferred to elite schools in sub-Saharan Africa. In many countries, including Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the imprimatur of the colonial England remain present in the secondary schooling systems. In these same countries, debates over comprehensive v. specialized high school education and the extent to which liberal arts or vocational subjects should be emphasized persist. Holsinger and Cowell (2000) argue that the launching of Sputnik in 1957 re-invigorated emphasis in science and technology. Ongoing advances in science and technology (including biology) have supported the continued dominance of emphasis on STEM fields in secondary and tertiary education.

In a review of secondary education in OECD countries, Sahlberg identified three principal ways in which secondary school is organized:

- Divided school-based upper secondary school system whereby upper secondary education is divided into general and vocational schools,
- Unified upper secondary school system whereby upper secondary education is organized within one school offering different programs (comprehensive), and
- Parallel school-based and work-based upper secondary school system whereby upper secondary education has school-based general and work-based vocational education options (Sahlberg, 2007, p.2).

Sahlberg, after offering this framework, then notes, “these organizational structures in most countries are a result of historical tradition rather than intentional design” (p. 2). The rest of the chapter outlines some pressures and discourses influencing the construction of secondary education in the modern world, with a specific focus on sub-Saharan Africa.

Defining secondary education

The 2012 Global Monitoring Report on youth and skills allows for a broad conceptualization of post-basic learning environments, which focus on youth who have completed basic education and includes secondary schools, vocational and technical schools, second-chance programs, short-duration skills development courses, and apprenticeships (UNESCO, 2012). This chapter works within this broad conceptualization of post-basic education, but focuses on formal education programs,

defined by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as ISCED levels 2, 3 and 4. The reason for this focus is because, historically, it has been the state, through public financing, which has underwritten mass expansion of post-basic education, usually through three forms – expansion of general secondary education, expansion of vocational education, or expansion of a blend of secondary and vocational education (Briseid & Caillods, 2004). This focus is not meant to place a lower value on other forms of skills development (e.g., traditional apprenticeships, casual labor, and enterprise-based training); however these forms of skills development are often not closely coupled with state education policy.²⁵ As such, this chapter, privileges the position of the state and public policy (as opposed to the market supply of and demand for education, credentials or skills) as being an important driver in the development of post-basic education.

Defining secondary. ISCED level 2, lower secondary education, is considered the last segment of “basic” or “compulsory” education and should be designed “to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which further educational opportunities can be systematically expanded” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 29). Upper secondary education, ISCED level 3, is recognized as fulfilling the requirements for tertiary preparation and skills for employment and requires completion of ISCED level 2 coursework. General secondary education is organized around a specific curriculum including a set of required and non-required subjects and certified through an end-of-cycle leaving exam (e.g., in Kenya, the KSCE; in South Africa, the NSC; in Ghana, the WASSCE), the performance on which determines whether the learner receives the certification and is granted the opportunity to access further education at a college and university. ISCED levels 2 or 3 may be classified as general or vocational education. In most countries, general secondary education is clearly identifiable and accounts for the majority of enrollments in post-basic enrollment. In 2009 in sub-Saharan Africa, the VET share of upper secondary enrollment was 16% (up from 9% in 1999) – though this figure varies greatly by country (UIS, 2011). VET programs also occupy ISCED level 4, post-secondary non-tertiary education, which UNESCO defines as providing “learning

²⁵ According to King (2011) casual labor is apprentice-like piece work prevalent in South and Southeast Asia

experiences building on secondary education and preparing for labour market entry as well as tertiary education” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 39).

Defining VET. Vocational Education and Training occupies a broader conceptual space than academically-oriented secondary education: VET reaches a broader age-group, has a broader range of goals and objectives and may take place in several different settings. The second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education defines TVET as, “those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupants in various sectors of economic and social life,” (UNESCO, 1999, as cited in MacLean and Lai, 2011, p. 3). World Bank (as cited in UIS, 2011) acknowledges the challenges of defining VET and offers a more restrictive definition, noting,

Defining TVET is often problematic because programmes are extremely heterogeneous in terms of content, frequency and duration. The main objective of TVET is to develop or maintain job-relevant skills for employment or for entry into the labour market. Job-relevant skills can be defined as a set of competencies valued by employers and useful for self-employment, including skills relevant to a specific job and other skills that enhance a worker’s productivity. (p. 49)

Many VET programs (e.g., FET colleges in South Africa and Youth Polytechnics in Kenya) enroll students with no education beyond lower secondary, those who dropped out of secondary school, and those who passed qualifying exams in academic secondary but did not gain access to university or seek employment-relevant certification (Balwanz, 2012; Taylor 2011). In South Africa and Kenya, ISCED level 3 VET programs provide certification which serves as the “vocational” equivalent of a general secondary school certificate. VET systems in both countries provide a pathway for further training and certification (e.g., higher level certificates and diplomas). Recent reforms in several countries (e.g., Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia) have supported (or are expected to support) enrollment growth in ISCED level 2 and 3 VET programs.

Global pressures to expand access and reform secondary education

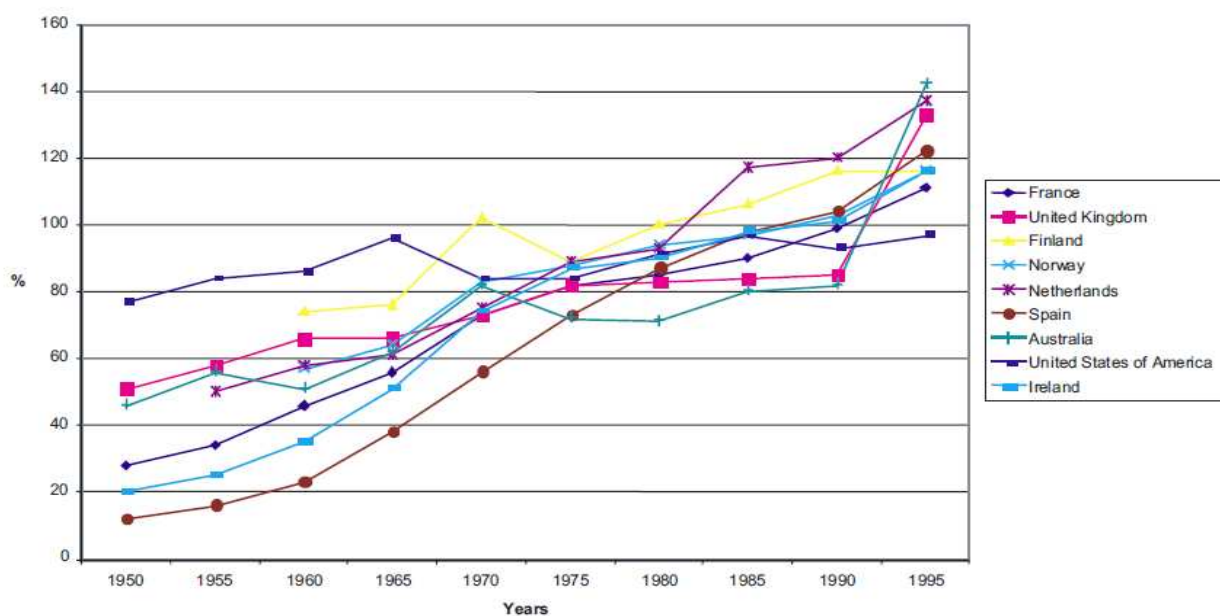
Access to secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa is expanding rapidly and is expected to continue to grow. Secondary education, historically and at present, is recognized as offering pathways to further education and training and the world of work.

However, in many countries, the growth in the number of secondary school graduates has exceeded the absorptive capacity of tertiary institutions and the labor market, leaving large numbers of youth in neither education, employment or training (NEET). Policy efforts to address these multiple pressures and issues include the expansion of access to secondary education and VET and in several countries, the creation of youth employment programs and enterprise and entrepreneurship development funds. Expansion of access has increased enrollment of youth from lower wealth quintile households, however inequities in access to secondary education remain large. The inequalities in access to education by household wealth increase at the tertiary level.

Secondary enrollment is growing at a rate faster than population growth in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Expansion of secondary education is a recent phenomenon. Briseid and Caillods (2004) note that while elementary education was made free and compulsory by the end of the nineteenth century in all European countries, it was not until the after the Second World War that secondary education realized significant expansion. Figure 6 identifies change in gross enrollment ratios in several major industrialized countries from 1950 to 1995. Secondary GER increased from below 60% to over 100% in most countries from 1950 to 1995.

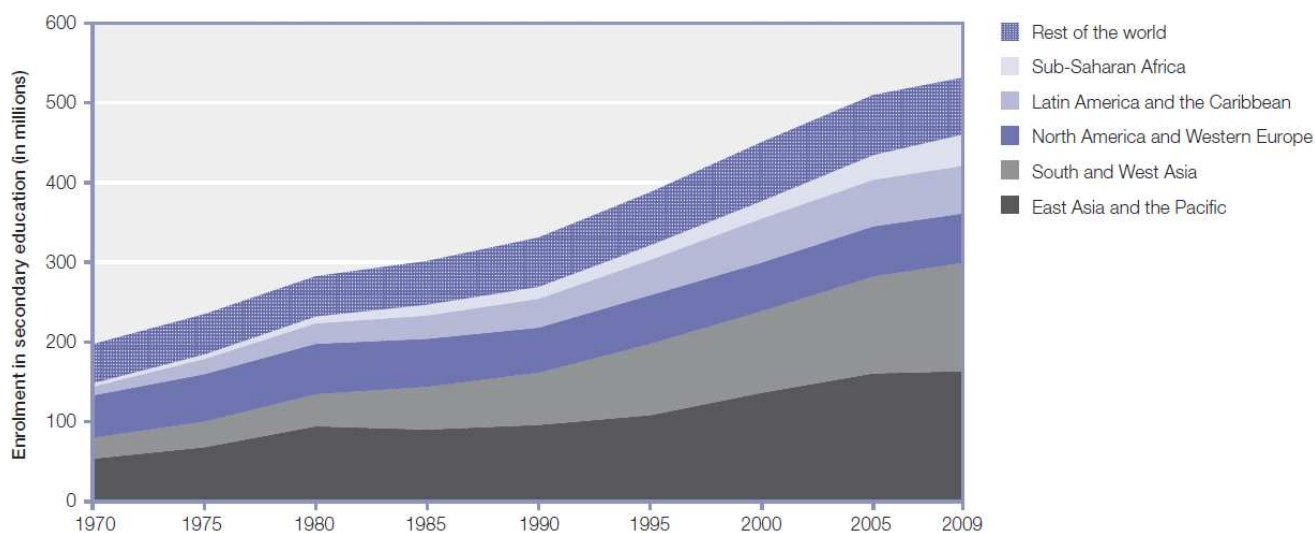
Figure 7 shows global enrollment in secondary education (by region) between 1970 and 2009. Enrollment in secondary education increased from 196 million students in 1970 to 531m students in 2009 (UIS, 2011). Figure 8 shows changes in school age population, secondary enrollment, and secondary GER in the Africa region from 1970 to 2009. From 1970 to 2009, enrollment in secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa grew from 4.3m to 39m pupils – with GER increasing from 11% to 36%. During this period the secondary-school-age population increased three-fold (UIS, 2011). Between 1999 and 2009 In Africa, gross enrollment ratios in the Africa region grew from 28% to 43% in lower secondary education and from 20% to 27% in upper secondary education. Notably, access to secondary education varies greatly across countries. Secondary GERs in South Africa and Kenya are 93% and 43%, respectively, with secondary GERs for Central African Republic, Niger, Somalia and Tanzania were at or below 6% in 2009 (UIS, 2011). Low aggregate secondary GER suggest great room for expansion.

Figure 6: Gross enrollment ratios in secondary education, 1950-1995, selected countries



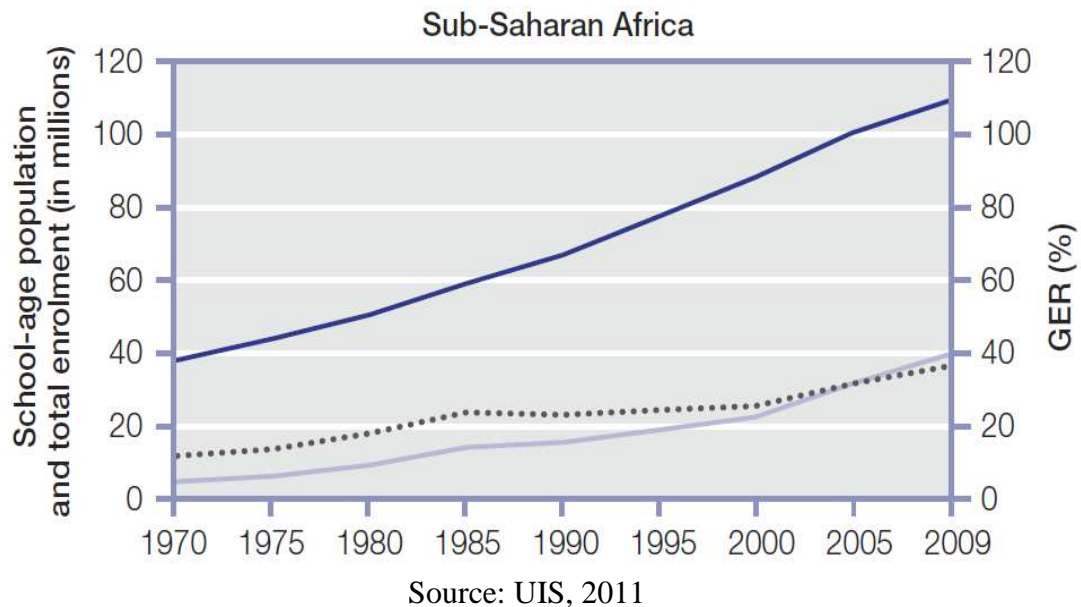
Source: Briseid & Caillods, 2004

Figure 7: Enrollment in secondary education by region, 1970-2009



Source: UIS, 2011

Figure 8: School-age population, secondary enrollment and secondary GER, Sub-Saharan Africa, 1970-2009



Lines are school age population (solid); Secondary GER (dotted); enrollment (low, light solid)

Pressure to expand access to secondary education comes from multiple sources. Population growth and increased levels of primary completion and transition put pressure on continued growth (UIS, 2011). Lewin (2008) notes that in low-enrollment countries in sub-Saharan Africa, primary system output is expected to more than double in the next decade – creating pressure to expand access to secondary and tertiary education. Increased economic and social aspirations, meaning that families identify access to secondary as essential to securing a better life, also put pressure on expansion. Success in academic education is widely recognized as the gateway to tertiary education and a secure formal sector job (Hoppers, 2009). Government rationales for expansion in OECD countries and in countries in sub-Saharan Africa also identify the increased demand for higher-level cognitive skills in the labor force and to compete in the global economy (Briseid & Caillods, 2004). These demands reflect differentiating, elite forming and/or the educative, human development possibilities of secondary education. Government responses to increased demand include expansion of secondary education and VET,

proclamation of free secondary education, and expansion of secondary education and VET bursary programs.

Constrained access to tertiary education and the world of work. Pathways from secondary education include transition to further education and training and the world of work. However, in the past decade, the number of new secondary graduates has exceeded the absorptive capacity of tertiary institutions and the labor market. Expansion of secondary and tertiary education and skills development programs, proposed solutions to skills, employability and unemployment challenges, co-exist with persistently high youth unemployment and the persistence of widespread poverty and inequality. Access to tertiary education in sub-Saharan Africa has nearly doubled in the past decade from a GER of 4% in 2000 to a GER of 7% in 2010 (UIS, 2011, estimates). However, this growth has been outpaced by the number of new secondary leavers. Secondary graduates not gaining access to tertiary education and those who have dropped out of secondary school before securing their diploma often look for work – but, like tertiary, work is also in short supply. Data in Kenya, South Africa and Zambia note:

In Kenya, only 39% of the 14 million youth are absorbed in the job market leaving the remaining 61% jobless. (MoYAS, 2012)

[In South Africa] in 2010 there were 3,200,000 young people in the 18–25 age group who were not in education, employment or training. (Perold, 2013)

[In Zambia] about 300,000 young people enter the labour market each year and with few employment opportunities the large number of unemployed youth is creating political and economic tensions in the country. (AfDB, 2012)

Fear of social disruption: another rationale for expansion? Concerns about social cohesion and youth violence and unrest (associated with poverty, inequality, unemployment, lack of opportunity, and political manipulation) are used to justify expansion of secondary and VET programs, as well as youth employment, youth service, and youth entrepreneurship and enterprise programs (Balwanz, 2012; EDC 2009; USAID, 2012). Referencing South Africa crime statistics, Cloete (2009) notes, “the average age of a house robber is between 19 and 25 years...of all arrested robbers, 90% had no matric [i.e., no secondary diploma] or were unemployed” (p. 17). In Kenya, the Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence identified unemployed and poor

youth, many of whom were recruited for pay to join political campaigns and criminal gangs, as both the primary perpetrators and targets of the post-election violence (EDC, 2009; MoYAS, 2011). The extent to which does secondary education access or completion exacerbates or remediates these issues and cultural patterns is unclear.

The pressures and dilemmas of secondary expansion are often considered concurrently with perspectives on secondary education reform. In many countries, Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia and even South Africa (which has a high secondary GER), the majority of students enrolled in secondary schools do not enter university and may face a degree of time out of education before accessing further education and training. Historically disadvantaged and marginalized groups have a harder time than their peers in making the expected post-secondary transition to tertiary education and the world of work. Will greater access to secondary education amid insufficient growth in access to tertiary education and jobs increase feelings of disillusion and increase youth vulnerability? The next section identifies reform discourses and priorities – some of which speak to the issues and dilemmas raised in this section.

Reform discourse

Academic secondary education

Why expand and reform? The World Bank initiated a Secondary Education in Africa initiative in 2003 and followed with its first policy statement on secondary education in over a decade, *Expanding opportunities and building competencies for youth people: a new agenda for secondary education* (World Bank, 2005) in 2005. In 2008, the World Bank published, *At the Crossroads: Choices for Secondary Education in sub-Saharan Africa* reflecting the “conclusions and recommendations from three regional SEIA conferences (Accra 2007, Dakar 2005, and Kampala 2003), eight thematic studies, various international research reports, and studies by country teams” (World Bank, 2008, p. xv). The Association for the Development of Education in Africa, an affiliate of UNESCO/IIEP, held its biennale on post-basic education in 2008, summarized in Hoppers (2009) and a triennial on Education and Training in 2011. These documents, along with efforts from academic, business, and NGO stakeholders have given shape to (and offered critique of) dominant discourses on secondary education over the past fifteen years.

Expanding opportunities (World Bank, 2005) and *At the Crossroads* (World Bank, 2008) associate *investment* in secondary education with acceleration of economic growth and poverty reduction by helping countries deal with economic and social change, specifically the demand for a more educated worker for a changing economy “driven by technology, and part of global networks of production and trade” (World Bank, 2008, p. 1). Expansion (access) and reform (quality) of secondary education are both emphasized as critical priorities in this discourse. This perspective conflates interests of individuals and countries: both require new knowledge and skills “to be competitive in the globalized world” (World Bank, 2005, p. 77). Knowledge and skills direct learners along the two main pathways from secondary: transition to tertiary education and the world of work. World Bank (2005) identifies the access challenges noted in the previous section, noting that during the transition from elite to mass secondary education, there will continue to be large numbers of school leavers who will not have access to tertiary education and who thus must be prepared with secondary education of knowledge and skills which prepare them for the world of work. World Bank (2005) also identifies the contribution of secondary education to improvements in health and gender equity, and democracy.²⁶ World Bank (2008) strongly grounds rationales for investment in secondary education and skills development from a human capital perspective as does much of the post-financial crisis literature on education and skills development (UNESCO, 2012; World Bank, 2013). Similar rationales are seen in sector plans of several countries (e.g., Education Sector Plans for Ghana, Kenya and Malawi, and various policy documents in South Africa).²⁷

Critiques, reform priorities and debates. In the dominant discourse, secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa is criticized as being out-of touch with the changing knowledge and skills needs of tertiary education and the world of work, perpetuating elite mindsets about knowledge and work to be valued, and with creating unrealistic expectations (Hoppers, 2009; World Bank, 2008). Arguing for curriculum reform which

²⁶ A colleague suggests that in these publications, the World Bank makes “courtesy calls” on some issues to acknowledge their importance, or placate critics, though after the courtesy call, the “emphasis” is largely forgotten. World Bank (2005), however, offers a broader discussion on the multiple purposes and issues facing secondary education than most other World Bank documents on secondary education reviewed for this essay.

²⁷ Sector plans for these countries and others is available on the Global Partnership for Education website.

separates academic from vocational curriculum from Grade 8 and seeks to enroll more pupils (40% of all secondary enrollments) in vocational studies, the Minister of Education in Zambia notes that the “school system at Grades 7 and 9 throws out learners who have no skills to survive on their own because the current curriculum prepares learners for white collar jobs.”²⁸ Researchers interested in education for the informal economy offer similar critique (Adams, 2007; EDC, 2009; World Bank, 2013). In most countries, current systems of academic secondary schools evolved out of colonial systems designed to track a small segment of the population into civil service jobs and further education. Secondary certification and tertiary entrance are mediated by high stakes leaving exams based on academic subjects (e.g., mathematics, English, the sciences, and history) and assessment of factual knowledge and lower level cognitive skills. World Bank (2005) notes,

Abstract, fact-centered, and decontextualized narrative knowledge prevails in the secondary curriculum and continues to be used for selective purposes in a setting of scarce educational and job opportunities, causing high dropout and high failure rates among secondary school students. (p. 78)

World Bank (2008) argues that the current secondary curriculum in most countries is over-crowded (a large number of subjects) and narrowly conceived (focusing on factual knowledge and lower level cognitive skills). World Bank (2008) offer a list of curriculum issues: the curriculum is outdated, overly linked to tertiary preparation and civil service, and poorly linked to the world of work and the labor market. Further, low levels of student learning, especially in mathematics and the sciences, and inadequate training in ICT, compromise the relevance of secondary education (p. 212).

New skills and knowledge; improving quality. World Bank (2005) and World Bank (2008) note that secondary schools need to impart new knowledge and skills based on changes in knowledge and needs in the world of work. New skills needed include higher-level cognitive skills (problem-solving), metacognitive / non-cognitive skills (e.g., teamwork, conflict resolution, and ability to deal with ambiguity), skills in areas of ICT, math, science and technology, and employability skills to enter the world of work and for lifelong learning. Crouch (2005) identifies low level of cognitive skills development, as

²⁸ <http://www.lusakatimes.com/2013/02/13/government-develops-new-school-curriculum/> Government develops new school curriculum.

measured by international assessments, as the critical challenge facing schools in South Africa. Crouch (2005) notes, “the numbers of those who reach the last year of secondary school in South Africa are equivalent to those from any other middle-country, but they are far worse equipped for the labour force,” (p. 18). There are several critiques of measuring educational quality via international assessments. Perhaps most notable is the question of the extent to which an assessment written in a learners’ second or third language provides the most accurate measure of cognitive skills development (Anamuah-Mensah et al., 2009 on Ghana; Shimada, 2010 on Kenya; Spaul, 2011 on South Africa).²⁹

Elite structures and a crisis of expectations. Pressure to “massify” secondary education without reform may also reproduce elite paradigms of knowledge, work and learning. Low transition to tertiary education and low absorption into the labor force from secondary education has led many critics to argue that secondary expansion is leading to a crisis of expectations. Of secondary education in Kenya, EDC (2009) notes, “the education system raises expectations, leading school leavers to disdain agricultural work, without providing the knowledge, skills, and disposition to seek livelihood through enterprise and self-employment” (p. 41). The prevailing paradigm recognizes school and education as academic and bookish, overly serious, and “above” manual labor and working with ones hands. In many schools, manual labor is often used as punishment for misbehavior (Lauglo, 2005; Sefa Dei, 2006). In Kenya, a policymaker working on the reform of youth polytechnics notes that “the majority of youth see agricultural work as punishment” (Balwanz 2012, p. 79). This criticism builds on a long history. A commission on education reform in Ghana argued that secondary education “fostered the development of unhealthy attitudes towards manual work and non-academic occupations” (The Dzobo committee White Paper (1974) on New Structure and Content of Education for Ghana, as cited in Thompson & Casely-Hayford, 2008, p. 9). On the curriculum in South Africa, Samoff (2008) argues that “even as it has expanded access, education in South Africa has maintained and perhaps reinforced its elitist character” (p. xvi). Wedekind (2013) echoes this sociological critique, wherein learners preference

²⁹ Still others identify the developing regime of international assessments as a new form of international hegemony over the construction of knowledge and argue against narrow constructions of knowledge and learning.

academic over vocational training, as a constraint to the success of FET colleges of South Africa.

Reproduction of inequality in Ghana and South Africa. Ghana provides an example of socio-economic inequality being reproduced through the schooling system. In Ghana the top 20% of senior high schools in Ghana account for 75.7% of pupils with WASSCE scores which qualify them for tertiary education. Pupils from the next 20% of senior high schools account for 16.7% of qualifying WASSCE scores. The BECE (Basic Education Certificate Exam) and WASSCE act as “screens” which keep a large percentage of basic and SHS leavers, predominantly those from poorer households, from attending the next level of education.³⁰ Djangmah (2011) describes how pupils’ unequal opportunities in basic education explain subsequent access to high quality secondary schools and ultimately, tertiary study, noting,

Secondary school education in Ghana is highly differentiated with regard to quality. The top schools which literally exclude public basic school pupils from admission on the basis of their weak BECE results grab the overwhelming proportion of tertiary education places. Considering that universities have more stringent requirements than non-university tertiary institutions university admissions must be almost the exclusive preserve of Ghanaian children who have attended fee-paying basic schools. (p. 13)

Distorting effects of high-stakes leaving exams. Much of the dominant discourse identifies the distorting effects on the curriculum of high-stakes exams (e.g., “high stakes examinations do not support curriculum change and learning,” World Bank, 2008), however, few reform ideas are proposed (Hoppers, 2009; World Bank, 2005; World Bank, 2008). The Delors Report (1996) and MacLean (2001) argue that we are not making the most of all forms of talent, but instead have high rates of academic failure, the production of exclusion, and the withering of aspirations.

That notion of a “mismatch” of youth skills-sets (e.g., academic, vocational, and employability skills) and mind-sets (e.g., work interests and expectations) vis-à-vis the realities of transition to adulthood and the world of work offers an epigrammatic solution to the “skills for jobs” challenge. Can we expect reform of vocational education to

³⁰ Three paragraphs from basic education in Ghana (2013). Djangmah references Addae-Mensa (2000), who shows that between 60 to 90 percent of students selected to various university degree programs came from the top 50 senior secondary schools in Ghana.

address some of the relevance, livelihoods, and jobs issues facing countries? Much of the vocational reform and skills discourse suggests as much.

Vocational secondary education

Evolution of recent discourse on VET follows two main stands: (i) discourse of VET that, while supporting reinvigorated dialogue on VET, also support a broader conceptualization of skills, related to EFA goal 3 and (ii) discourse on VET and skills focused on the contribution of VET and skills development to economic growth and employment – whether in the rapidly growing informal sector or in modern sectors which require new types of knowledge and skills. During the aughts, discourse on VET explored the following: old debates on investment in VET were revisited (e. g. the vocationalization of secondary education, in Lauglo, 2005 and the pros and cons of increased investment in vocational education and training in Oketch, 2007 and Adams, 2007); new possibilities for VET were explored starting with UNESCO/IIEP publications from Atchoarena and Delluc (2001); skills development (through VET, apprenticeships and other forms of training) for job creation in the informal sector (Palmer, 2008; Walther & Filipak, 2007; and World Bank, 2013a) and possibilities of non-formal education to support skills development goals (Hoppers, 2006). Several publications on secondary education included content on the relationship between secondary and VET at ISCED levels 2 and 3, including World Bank (2005), World Bank (2008) and Hoppers (2009).

Inclusion of “skills” into the VET dialogue has broadened the discourse and invited a broader range of stakeholders into debate over skills development. Skills discourse draws on EFA Goal three which highlights the importance of “equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.” King and Palmer (2006) and King and Palmer (2008) re-invigorated this discussion by arguing that the UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports from 2002-2008 ignored serious efforts to track skills. King and Palmer (2008) quote Nick Burnett, former Director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report, who noted “we do not really know how we are doing on skills, because we have not figured out properly how to define them and measure them” (p. 1). The skills discourse is related to efforts to better conceptualize EFA goal 3, related to post-basic learning and life skills, as well as the association of skills with the world of work and

associated goals of increased productivity, poverty reduction, and economic growth (King and Palmer, 2010).

Rationale for VET. Oketch (2007) identifies several historical rationales for investing in VET, many of which are echoed in UNESCO (2012). He notes that “VET should significantly improve the chances of youth who are economically and academically disadvantaged in gaining stable wage employment or self-employment” (p. 230). Referencing Middleton et al. (1993), Oketch (2007) continues, noting that “vocational education and training improves attitudes towards skilled, manual work, and thus diverts at least some young people from seeking the white-collar jobs that are in increasingly short supply” (p. 221). World Bank (2013) adds that investment in VET supports transition for work in the informal sector and entrepreneurial work. USAID explicitly de-emphasizes investment in upper-secondary education, but identifies vocational and workforce training in both its education and youth strategies, (USAID, 2011; USAID 2012).³¹

Critique of VET. Atchoarena and Delluc (2001) provide a summary critique of VET. VET is of low quality; has a very high unit cost; is not suited to local or national socio-economic conditions; is not aligned with the needs of the labor market or informal sector; and it produces graduates with a high rate of unemployment (p. 38). McGrath (2011) notes,

The established critique of African vocational education is about the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of vocational provision, whether in schools or in post-school institutions...such institutions are widely characterised as containing poor quality staff and students; working with outdated curricula and outdated equipment; lacking real engagement with the world-of-work and incapable of supporting their graduates’ employability as a result. (p. 39)

Many of these critiques (e.g., low status, under-qualified staff, poor resourcing, out-of-date curriculum) are echoed in recent evaluations of youth polytechnics in Kenya, VET institutions in Zambia and FET colleges in South Africa (AfDB, 2013; DHET, 2012; MoYAS, 2012). Tracing the history of VET discourse, Powell (2012,) notes the regular emergence of the argument that, “young people avoid VET in favour of an academic

³¹ USAID (2011) states, “We will deemphasize general upper-secondary education investments except in cases that contribute to restoring access in conflict or crisis-affected environments or where vocational or workforce development training is delivered in secondary settings” (p. 8).

education, as they regard VET as preparing them for unemployment or for work that is repetitive, boring and underpaid” (p. 643). Blaug (1973), early on, observed that often individuals can tell that academic streams promised higher wages than vocational education. Vocational education was branded as useless and only useful for those with less aspiration for better paying jobs (Oketch, 2007), such as informal sector work which offers lower pay, fewer benefits, less job security, and limited opportunities for advancement (in education or employment) compared to formal sector jobs. As alluded to in the discussion on academic secondary education, in sub-Saharan Africa, VET is associated with low social status, manual labor, and racialized education and, in many cases, the colonial labor hierarchy. UNESCO (2012) argues “formal secondary schooling is the most effective way to develop the skills needed for work and life” (p. 4).

VET Reform: Recreating the past or remediating the present? Crises in secondary education (e.g., low transition to tertiary and presumed irrelevance of the secondary curriculum) and issues of poverty, inequality, marginalization, and unemployment have been drawn on to promote expansion and reform of VET – drawing on rationales old (see above) and new. McGrath (2012a) and Powell (2012) argue that reform at FET colleges in South Africa (which offer the vocational equivalent of secondary certification) has the possibility of changing the perception of VET. This rationale is consistent with that of Middleton et al. (1993) and Oketch (2007) and has been critiqued extensively. Drawing on a capabilities framework, Powell argues that by providing genuine pathways to youth seeking a better life, FET colleges build youth’s capability to aspire.

What does recent discourse and experience with VET suggest? On the one hand, the interest in VET as a solution to directing marginalized youth with skills and toward jobs, and toward employment creation, persists. Unemployment is identified as exacerbating vulnerability and exclusion. Of course, there are many ways to address issues of unemployment (or poverty, or inequality) – thereby reducing youth vulnerability, exclusion, and possible manipulation related by political forces. Is skills training for marginalized youth a sufficient response? Probably not, when considered against possibilities for change in labor laws, land tenure laws, and social protection measures which could influence youth interests in certain types of education and labor

(Samoff, 2008; Balwanz, 2012). This perspective also may lead one to wonder – why, in the first place, are some learners marginalized? Why is vocational education for one type of youth and academic education for another type of youth? Ohba (2011), Powell (2012), and McGrath (2012a), along with the Department for Higher Education in South Africa (2012); however, argue that vocational education offered genuine possibilities for the development of human potential and capabilities and improved transition to the world of work.

Blurring academic and vocational secondary education

Several documents from both the secondary education and VET discourses argue that the conceptual distinctions between general secondary schooling and VET are becoming increasingly blurred (Hoppers, 2009; MacLean and Lai 2011; McGrath 2011; World Bank, 2005, World Bank 2008) and in relation, of the need for a convergence of teaching academic knowledge and practical skills (UNESCO, 2005) in vocational programs. MacLean and Lai (2011) note,

Essentially, the goal of education is ‘to create independent problem solvers [with] sufficient depth of understanding’. In contrast, the goal of training ‘is to teach people to follow prescribed procedures and to perform in a standardized manner’ (Gray & Herr, 1998, p. 159). What appears to be taking place in the changing ‘world of work’ is a convergence between these two—formerly distinct—points of view. This convergence is important for the future of education, particularly TVET. (p. 5)

From this perspective, a new challenge is for VET is to not only support learner acquisition of practical and procedural knowledge associated with particular trades and bodies of knowledge, but to provide theoretical grounding and develop work habits needed for independent problem-solving and taking initiative, general cognitive skills, and general non-cognitive skills. The UNESCO 2010 Global Monitoring Report, (as cited in UIS, 2011) notes that “a lesson from countries that provided VET programmes successfully is that high levels of literacy, numeracy, and broad-based general education are the real foundation for flexible and transferable vocational skills” (p. 53). Recent reforms in secondary level VET programs in Kenya and South Africa manifest this broader conception of VET – seeking to ensure learners develop foundational skills and are exposed to some general liberal arts content, in addition to taking “vocation-specific”

coursework (Balwanz, 2012; Taylor, 2011). Hoppers (2009) characterized the debate on this issue at the ADEA 2008 biennale thusly,

Contrary views were held by those participants pointing to the value of general education and the nurturing of generic skills right through secondary level education, and those appealing for more and earlier (pre-) vocational education...Many emphasized the power of general education to simultaneously lay a solid foundation for lifelong learning and for developing the specialist skills that Africa badly needs. *Ministers at the Biennale explained the acute dilemma facing them over decision making in this domain.* [emphasis mine]. (p. 209)

This blurring may explain some of the heterogeneity in the VET landscape: in some countries, governments are promoting vocational education in upper secondary levels and enrollment is expanding (e.g., Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa) in other cases, informal settings (traditional apprenticeships, as opposed to formal educational institutions) are identified the main, and preferred route, to delivering skills development and training (World Bank, 2008; World Bank, 2013b).³²

This blurring may also be associated with the emergence of other types of skills development programs offering, what could be considered “skills packages.” The Kenya Youth Empowerment Project and the CAP-Youth Empowerment Institute, both of which operate short courses in Kenya, emphasize the importance of providing training in life and employability skills, training in a specific technical area and experience (Balwanz, 2012). The “Learn, Earn, Save” initiative (funded by MasterCard and operating in Tanzania Uganda and Kenya) seeks to “to integrate access to finance, business skills, employment or self-employment with educational opportunities.”³³ Filmer et al. (2013), argue for developing “skills packages” to promote employability. Packages may include “technical and life skills,” “business and life skills,” and capital and skills training.

Allais (2012) and McGrath (2011) argue that evidence of blurring may help to remediate the artificial distinction between the head and the hand characteristic of the English tradition of vocational training, and manifested in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Allais (2012) and McGrath (2011) discuss continental conceptions of VET and

³² Much of this analysis comes from the World Bank. McGrath (2011, p. 38) notes that the World Bank critique of public provision of TVET “cannot credibly be separated from its wider ideological attack on the inefficiencies of the public sector (World Bank 1991 and 1995; Middleton, Zideman and Adams 1993; Johanson and Adams 2004).”

³³ <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/olpd/research/MasterCardfdn/default.html>

Catholic conceptions of “integrated human development.” Referencing continental conceptions, Allais (2012) notes,

VET is provided through comprehensive programmes that are part of the national education system and thus constitute the continuation of ‘education’ (commonly based on a curriculum, with a broad content) rather than ‘training’ as more narrowly focused on the labour market and the job’. There is concern with ability to plan, carry out, and evaluate, based on professional judgment and responsible decision-making. (p. 635)

An integrated human development perspective identifies the relationship between a person’s vocation with his or her moral and spiritual well-being. In both cases, VET is more than a vehicle to satisfy manpower planning, human capital, or productivist rationales for investment in human development. Rather, VET could offer a broader understanding of a vocation and meaningful, dignified labor in human life. In a review on education and work in transition societies, Carnoy and Samoff (1990) argue that the distinction between academic and vocational knowledge is artificial. They write,

In a capitalist society, academic education is separated from vocational education, as if it served a different purpose rather than simply supplying different kinds of knowledge and access to social/material status for different groups (social classes) of youth. In transition societies, all education is defined as vocational and the state attempts to minimize material and status among vocations. (p. 90)

This blurring between academic and vocational can be argued for, and interpreted through several different perspectives. The blurring appears to relate changing needs in the world of work – requiring foundational skills and higher-level cognitive and non-cognitive). This blurring could also represent a transition to a “continental” or Catholic understanding of vocational education, which identifies professional judgment, responsible decision-making, dignity and ethical practice as integral facets of preparation for a vocation.

Coda

A neoliberal economic discourse, privileging the assumptions of human capital theory, has played a dominant role in shaping reform discourse and priorities in secondary education over the last several decades. This discourse is prevalent in many OECD countries and developing countries. Reform discourse in secondary and vocational

education purposes human development toward economic ends, suggests the “inevitability” of economic globalization, argues for the importance of national competitiveness, STEM education and learners acquisition of certain types of knowledge and skills (e.g., English, employability skills), and recognizes the increased casualization and insecurity of labor and growth in informal sector work as phenomena to which education must respond. Another way of framing this discourse, as articulated by some interviewees, is that education is about “survival” and competing to survive in the current “harsh” socio-economic environment. The practice of high stakes leaving exams, a historical feature of most elite secondary systems, continues to significantly shape the experience of secondary education and the relationship between education, work, and society. The dominant discourse recognizes inequality as a problem to be addressed, but does not recognize it as a structural feature of the current system and is either silent, or pays only lip service to, other possible human development priorities.

It is important to note, however, that the practice of secondary education, especially in elite schools, offers many discontinuities with the neoliberal discourse shaping policy. Elite models of secondary education globally, and in sub-Saharan Africa, generally offer much more than academic preparation in a narrow field of subjects. Elite schools also provide a rich learning environment in which learners are engaged in more holistic development through sports, extra-curricular activities, and engagement in spiritual or religious activities. This is true of secondary schools in South Africa – where quintile five (the wealthiest) schools participate in sporting and academic competitions and provide learners with varied opportunities to engage in and develop skills in the arts, culture, music, and politics.

Chapter 5: Secondary education in South Africa – a general overview

This chapter offers a general overview of secondary education in South Africa. I present some of the features, descriptive data, and high profile issues concerning academic secondary schools and the NCV in FET colleges. The chapter concludes with a brief reflection on the social construction of secondary education. The goal of this chapter is to familiarize the reader with secondary education in the South African context prior to wading into thornier debates. The next chapter situates secondary education within the social and historical context of South Africa and identifies some of the major debates surrounding education reform.

Introduction

That all South Africans attain a level 4 qualification – the equivalent of a grade 12 education – is one of the goals of the Government of South Africa. This effort is driven through the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training, and demonstrated through learner attainment of a National Senior Certificate (based on performance on an assessment following Grade 12 enrollment in secondary school) or a National Certificate Vocational (based on performance on a qualifying exam taken following completion of the NCV course at a Further Education and Training college).

Starting in Grade 10, NSC and NCV learners choose a particular “specialization” (also called learning area or occupational area) and then follow that specialization over three years of study. NSC learners may specialize in one of several learning areas, including the sciences, business studies and agricultural studies. Once a specialization is chosen, the learner will take courses and certification exams associated with the subjects in the learning areas. NCV learners choose from one of eleven different occupational areas and then take courses and associated certification exams in those subjects. The specialization model is different from a comprehensive model of secondary education in the United States. In the latter, learners may choose from a wide variety of subjects in Grades 10-12 and high school graduation is based on earning sufficient credits in each of a variety of learning areas.

As noted in the introduction, academic secondary schools are geared toward preparation for the NCS exam and are historically associated with university preparation (Wedekind, 2013). Starting in Grade 10, learners are required to take four compulsory subjects (Home Language, First Additional Language, Life Orientation and either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy) and three electives. The electives are based on the specialization chosen by the learner. For example, a learner specializing in the sciences may take Life Sciences, Physical Science and Economics. The learner will then generally take the same seven subjects for each of the three years of secondary school and then take NSC exams in these same seven subjects. Similar to the NSC, NCV learners are required to take three foundational courses (English, Life Orientation and Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy) and four courses associated with one of 11 occupational areas. Successful completion of the requirements in six of seven subjects allows learners to transition from Grade 10 (level 2) to Grade 11 (level 3) of the NCV. A NCV learner who has earned a level 4 qualification is considered to have attained the equivalent of a grade 12 education and may transition to higher levels of education either at an FET college or university.

Table 6 provides an overview of the NSC and the NCV. Academic secondary schools reach a much larger population of learners, offers a more direct link to university education (e.g., some universities do not accept an NCV, or may favor an NSC over an NCV) and are geared NSC preparation, which mediates tertiary entry. The NCV (and FET colleges generally) reach a more diverse population of learners in terms of academic background and age-cohort. However, both the NSC and the NCV have similar policy goals: preparing youth for further education and the world of work.

Before moving further, it is important to clarify a few issues specific to South Africa. First, it is important to distinguish academic secondary schools from FET colleges. Secondary schools have a long history in South Africa and are located in learners' communities. FET colleges, on the other hand, were established in the early 2000s and only began offering the National Certificate Vocational in 2007. There are fifty FET colleges, each with several campuses. FET colleges offer several types of courses, including the NCV. The distinction between secondary schools and FET

colleges is important: NSC learners go to school in the community, while NCV learners have moved to new communities to go to college.

Table 6: Comparison of NSC and NCV

Category	NSC	NCV
Intake / student population	Grade 9 leavers	Grade 9 leavers Secondary dropout NSC holders Some adult learners
Age group	16-18 year-olds (majority)	16-18 (6%) 18-24 (67%) 25-34 (22%)
Enrollment / Schools	2.6m 6,000+ schools	120,000+ 50 colleges/248 campuses
Curriculum focus	Foundational skills “academic” knowledge	Foundational skills General occupational knowledge
Pathway	Tertiary education	Further education and training World of Work

Source: Sheppard & Sheppard, 2012; DBE, 2012a

A second important issue is South Africa’s National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF provides a framework which associates qualifications with different levels of education. Grades 10, 11 and 12 of secondary education are associated with NQF levels 2, 3 and 4. Thus NCV level 2, level 3 and level 4 are associated with grades 10, 11 and 12, respectively. The NCV level 4 is seen as equivalent to an NSC. A third area requiring clarification is the term “Further Education and Training” which is often shortened to FET. In South Africa, grades 1-9 are described as basic education, while grades 10-12 (at academic secondary schools and FET colleges) are termed Further Education and Training. This is confusing because secondary education, focused on NSC preparation, does not take place at an FET college, and FET colleges offer courses which extend beyond the Grade 10-12 range. To maintain consistency, I will only use the term “FET” to discuss FET colleges and NCV learners.³⁴

³⁴ FET colleges have recently been renamed TVET colleges.

A final area requiring clarification is the term “post-schooling.” This term refers to any schooling which is not basic or secondary school. FET colleges are considered post-school institutions, since they are neither basic schools nor secondary schools. However, FET colleges offer the NCV, which on the NQF, and in the admissions criteria of many Universities, is considered the equivalent to the NSC. In this research I often distinguish between “learners” and “students.” In South Africa a “learner” refers to an individual who is studying in a basic or secondary school and a “student” is someone who is studying at an FET college or university. The next two sections provide detailed background on academic secondary schools and FET colleges.

Academic secondary schools

This section summarizes some of main issues which come up in a literature review of secondary education in South Africa. Some of the main issues in the literature include: the extent to which the NSC exam is conflated with the purpose of secondary education, high rates of dropout, the NSC exam, learners’ transition to university, educational quality, and pervasive inequality by race, class and geographic location.

Conflating an NSC pass with the purpose of secondary education. In DBE policy documents, the purpose of secondary education and the purpose of the NSC leaving exam are often conflated. Of the NSC, Wedekind (2013) notes that while different stakeholders attribute different purposes to the NSC, historically and up to the present, “the school leaving certificate had become strongly associated with one function, namely providing access into university level programmes” (p. 7). This sentiment is echoed in a recent DBE publication, *The Ministerial Task Team Report on the National Senior Certificate*, which places great emphasis on the role of secondary education in preparing learners for tertiary study, and of the mediating role of the NSC in differentiating learners (DBE, 2014a). Other DBE documents identify the central role of the secondary school curriculum and the NSC as providing academic preparation for tertiary education (DBE, 2010; DBE, 2014c; GDE, 2013). The majority of secondary school learners attending academic secondary schools enroll in learning areas associated with business studies or sciences streams. These streams contain subjects thought to be helpful in securing admission to university.

Dropout. In academic secondary schools, the majority of Grade 9 learners continue to Grade 10. However, from Grade 10, the incidence of dropout is very high. Table 7 shows the number of learners enrolled in ordinary secondary schools for grades 9-12, the age-group population, and the GER by Grade in 2010 (DBE, 2012a).³⁵ The table highlights the steep decline in enrollment between Grades 10 and 12: from a GER of 100% to 57%. In a separate analysis, the *Ministerial Task Team Report on the National Senior Certificate* (2014) states, “the dropout and repeater rates from grades 10 to 11 and 11 to 12 are alarming in the extreme and suggest that large numbers of learners are leaving or repeating in the years approaching the NSC examination” (p. 110). Drawing on data from the 2008-2011 academic years, the report finds an 18% decrease in the total number of learners enrolled between Grades 10 and 11 and a 34% decrease in the total number of learners enrolled between Grades 11 and 12. If we use the data from the table below, we find that if we start with an enrollment of 100 learners in Grade 10 only 57 learners make it to grade 12. If we go a step further and assume an NSC pass rate of 70% (the average pass rate over the last several years), then of the 100 original grade 10 learners, only 40 learners leave secondary school having passed the NSC.

Table 7: Learners and age-group population enrolled in ordinary schools, grades 9-12 (2010)

	Learners	Age group population	GER
Grade 9	1.009m	1.045	97%
Grade 10	1.039m	1.037m	100%
Grade 11	.841m	1.027m	82%
Grade 12	.579m	1.016m	57%

Source: DBE, 2012b (report shows 2010 data)

The NGO Equal Education offers a similar analysis:

In 2002 there were 1,261,827 learners enrolled in public schools for Grade 1 (DOE, Education Statistics in SA at a Glance, 2002, p.8). In 2011 there were 1,055,790 learners in Grade 10 (DBE, School Realities Report 2011, p.3).

³⁵ EMIS (2010) points out that some learners in the FET age band not enrolled in ordinary schools may be enrolled in FET colleges or ABET classes (thus accounting for lower GER in grades 11 and 12).

576,490 learners enrolled for Matric in 2013. This means that 479 300 were lost between Grades 10 and 12, representing a 45% dropout rate. (p.1) ³⁶

Table 8 identifies reasons provided by 14 – 17 year olds for not attending school as a percentage of the total not attending an educational institution. “Fees” (34%) and “education is useless” (18%) are the two main reasons for not attending school. Other factors for not attending school include illness, family commitment, pregnancy and working. When data are disaggregated by gender, twice as many boys (22%) as girls find education “useless.” For girls, pregnancy and family commitments each account for over 10% of responses, while for boys, illness (10%), failed exams (8%) and work (8%) follow the top two reasons (Sheppard, 2009). Referencing data from Social Surveys, DBE (2010) echoes several of these issues, noting:

[For girls] teenage pregnancy emerged as the single biggest reason for being out of school, affecting 22% of children. In addition, the cost of education and general financial pressures were identified as factors contributing to children being out of school in over one third of all cases. (p. 27)

Table 8: Reasons for not attending school (from 14-17 year olds)

Reason Description	14-17 Year olds
Too old/young	1.0%
Has completed school/education	2.7%
School/education institution is too far away	1.3%
No money for fees	34.3%
He/she is working (at home or job)	6.4%
Education is useless or uninteresting	17.7%
Illness	9.5%
Pregnancy	8.1%
Failed exams	5.6%
Got married	0.7%
Family commitment (child minding, etc.)	8.2%
Other/ Unspecified	4.6%

Source: Sheppard, 2009

³⁶<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71616/page71654?oid=504479&sn=Detail&pid=71616>

What other factors contribute to school dropout? Fleisch et al. (2010) state that dropping out of school results from a combination of inter-related factors. Summarizing, DBE (2011b) notes:

Fleisch et al (2010:7) noted that poverty alone did not explain why children were not in school and identified other factors (such as disability, family structure, i.e., not living with biological parents or grandparents, orphan-hood, being eligible for, but not accessing social welfare and living in isolated communities) which, combined with poverty, make children more vulnerable to dropping out of schools. Strassburg et al. (2010: 40-41) found that financial pressures and complex social processes (such as teenage pregnancy and substance abuse) combined with in-school factors (such as lack of stimulation and support) result in youth disengaging from their education and eventually dropping out of school. (p.3)

To these factors are added the concern that “high matric pass rates are being pursued [by schools] at the expense of learner retention” (Equal Education, 2013). While it is difficult to verify the extent to which learners are pushed out, several publications point to “push-out” as a critical issue (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2008; Jansen & Blank, 2014;). Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2008) note,

If learners are realizing that their education has not improved their capabilities, then it may explain their reluctance to continue schooling beyond grade 9, when enrollment figures dip significantly. In the senior secondary years, pressure on schools to perform in the high-stakes matric exams may result in them pushing out learners who are particularly weak and unlikely to succeed. Learners may themselves recognize that they are not coping with the classroom content and boredom or economic opportunities outside of school in the form of crime for young men may leave youth feeling there is little value in pushing through. (pps. 9-10)

In a report on learner dropout and retention in secondary school, DBE (2011b) emphasizes the negative psychological and social implication of leaving schooling after 10 years with “no qualification” as contributing to “disillusionment amongst youths” (p. 6).

The NSC examination. The National Senior Certificate qualification is the main pathway for admission to higher education institutions, namely studies leading to a Higher Certificate, Diploma or Bachelor’s Degree. To obtain an NSC a candidate must, depending on the minimum requirements, achieve either 40% or 30% in six subjects. In the seventh subject a candidate is allowed to achieve less than 30% (DBE, 2012a). After

accounting for required subjects (e.g., Life Orientation and Home Language), in 2013, the five subjects in which the largest number of learners wrote exams were Life Sciences, Business Studies, Geography, Physical Sciences and Accounting – all subjects in the Sciences or Business Studies learning areas (DBE, 2014b).

Given the practice of learning areas, these data suggest that the majority of learners in academic secondary schools in South Africa have taken only sciences or business studies courses during their three years of secondary education. Notably, the sciences and business studies exams are the most highly subscribed, in part because of competition to enter university and because of entrance requirements for highly desired courses of study. Learners may select from over 27 subjects to be tested in languages, sciences, social sciences, the arts and business and management studies. Less popular exam subjects include History, Dramatic Arts, Religion Studies, and Music. In sum, what does the path to the NSC, and onward to university look like? Nearly 700,000 learners drop out (or are pushed out) of school during their twelve years basic and secondary schooling. Of those who take the NSC, 30% fail (e.g., last year over 120,000 learners failed) and an additional 200,000 do not gain admittance to university.³⁷

Results on international assessments. Education quality, as measured by the comparison of results in international assessments with other countries is often been described as “abysmal” (Chisholm, 2012). In a review of 2003 PISA scores, Crouch (2005) argues that “there is little doubt that the biggest two problems South Africa faces are the extreme inequality in actual learning achievement, and the relatively low level in this achievement across all groups” (p. 18). Recent results on TIMSS, SACMEQ and PIRLS results place South Africa at the bottom of participating countries and often below “low performance” benchmarks. However, recent results on TIMSS, which evaluates math and science competencies show significant improvement between 2002 and 2011 scores, the equivalent of moving up one and a half grade levels, especially among learners identified as disadvantaged (HSRC, 2011).³⁸ Recent results on reading and language assessments are less sanguine; the most recent iterations of the SACMEQ and

³⁷ In 2011, there were 496,090 grade 12 candidates who sat for the NSC. The number passing the NSC was 348,117, of whom an estimated 175,000 were admitted to university. (Cloete et al., 2012).

³⁸ Between TIMSS 2002 to TIMSS 2011, there has been an improvement in the Grade 9 mathematics achievement scores in the public school sector, with the average scale score increasing 63 points, from 285 to 348. For Grade 9 science, the average scale score increased by 60 points, from 267 to a score of 327.

PIRLS assessments show either stagnation or limited improvement. Low levels of English proficiency among South African students explain, in part, low scores on TIMSS, SACMEQ and PISA exams.³⁹

Pervasive inequality. In South Africa, results on national exams and international assessments show persistent inequalities by class (by income quintile), race, geographic location, and former department (e.g., Christie, 2007; DBE, 2012a; HSRC, 2011; Spaull, 2012). Note that “Former department” refers the race-based administration of schools under tricameralism.⁴⁰ Christie (2007) notes that learners from poor schools that were created by apartheid legislation for black South Africans, as well as new schools created by the current Department of Education primarily for black South Africans continue to under-perform in relation to schools with different apartheid histories. Chisholm (2012) continues, noting that “the Bantustan legacy remains strong into the present. These areas remain the poorest in the country. The majority of children continue to go to school in these areas, and the quality of schooling overall is considered to be poorest here too” (p. 85-86).

Based on this picture, Spaull (2011) argues that South Africa remains “a tale of two schools: one which is wealthy, functional and able to educate students, while the other is poor, dysfunctional, and unable to equip students” (p.26) with basic skills. Two decades after the transition from apartheid, Chisholm (2012) notes that almost 30% of public schools charge fees while 70% of schools are fee-free schools. She concludes: “what this means is that there is currently a two-tiered system of state-aided, fee paying and state-funded, non-fee paying public schools in South Africa” (p. 93).⁴¹ Van der Berg

³⁹ The report goes on to note “In countries where a large proportion of learners are from homes where the language of the test (and thus the language of instruction) is not spoken at home, the mathematics and science scores were generally lower. In South Africa, 26% of learners reported that they ‘always or almost always’ spoke the language of the test at home, while 9% reported they ‘never’ did so. Internationally, 79% of learners reported they ‘almost always or always’ spoke the language of the test at home while only 4% ‘never’ did so. (HSRC, 2011, p. 6). This assessment is echoed by Spaull (2011) in his review of South Africa’s SACMEQ III results.

⁴⁰ Under the Tricameral system, instituted in the mid-1980s, White, Coloured and Asian Schools were administered under separate legislative structures, empowered to establish their own departments of education. Schools for black South Africans remained under the administration of the Department of Education and Training.

⁴¹ The creation of fee-paying schools was a compromise in the transition from apartheid desired by whites to maintain their privileges.

(2008) echoes this concern, noting that since the political transition in 1994, “educational quality in historically black schools — which constitute 80% of enrollment and are thus central to educational progress — has not improved significantly” (p. 2).

The one million learners who drop out, fail the NSC, or even with a pass, fail to gain university admissions are disproportionately from poor schools. In 2012, over 90% of these learners (100,000) in schools with low NSC pass rates were from Quintile 1-3 schools – South Africa’s poorest schools (DBE, 2014b). Fifty-seven per cent of the 460,000 black pupils passed the national school leaving exams in 2008, compared to 99 per cent of the 41,000 white pupils (Schuster, 2011). The low level of teacher subject matter knowledge, high rates of teacher absenteeism, and insufficient curriculum coverage in the majority of schools – mainly schools in lower income quintiles (quintiles 1, 2, and 3) perpetuate low quality. Taylor (2011) argues that the majority of South African teachers know little more about the subjects they teach than what the curriculum expects of their children and that some teachers know considerably less than this. In a report on 2011 TIMSS results, HSRC (2011) notes that “60% of math learners and 53% of science learners were taught by teachers with a degree. Internationally, this figure is closer to 90 percent” (p. 31). We now turn to an overview of the post-school landscape and the National Certificate Vocational course offered at FET colleges.

FET colleges and the NCV

This section summarizes some of main trends and issues which come up in a literature review of FET colleges and the NCV in South Africa. Some of the main issues in the literature include: the recent establishment of the FET colleges and the NCV, rapid enrollment growth, the diversity of learners in terms of educational background and age, educational quality, dropout, certification rates, and transition to the world of work.

Establishment of FET colleges and the NCV. FET colleges are designed to support intermediate skills development and exist “at the cross roads between school, higher education and the world of work” (Powell & Lolwana, 2012, p. 10). After grade 9, pupils may opt to take a course preparing for a National Vocational Certificate in an FET college. The NCV is an occupationally specific course of study which includes foundational subjects and a number of pre-vocational subjects. FET colleges therefore reach several student populations: those that have completed Grade 12 and passed the

NSC, those that left school before reaching Grade 12, and those who completed Grade 12, but failed the NSC. FET colleges are one of the only education options for pupils who have dropped out of school or who do not have an NSC. Several sources estimate that about 50% of FET college students have an NSC (DHET, 2012; Taylor, 2011).⁴² FET colleges are distributed across South Africa's nine provinces and provide 248 campuses, many in low-income areas, including several townships.

NCV enrollment trends. Enrollment at Public FET colleges generally, and in their main programs, the NCV and NATED (N1-N6) courses, continues to grow. The first NCV intake in 2007 enrolled 25,804 pupils. Two years later, NCV enrollment grew to 119,487. In 2012, NCV enrollment stood at 140,575 (DHET, 2012; DHET, 2013). Table 9 shows a two year trend in Full Time Equivalent enrollment in the NCV program at public FET colleges. NCV courses predominantly reach black South African and colored students in the 18-24 year-old age range. Youth between the ages of 18-24 account for the majority, over 67%, of FET college enrollments. Learners aged 25-35 account for 21% of NCV enrollment. Black South Africans constitute 84 per cent of FET college enrollments, followed by coloureds (10 per cent), whites (5 per cent) and Indians (1 per cent). The gender profile of public FET colleges is 52 % male and 48 % female range (Sheppard & Sheppard, 2012).

Table 9: Two year trend NCV and NATED Full Time Equivalent (FTE) enrollment and head at Public FET colleges

	2011 (FTE)	2012 (FTE)	2012 (head-count enrollment)
NCV	116,212	138,711	140,575
NATED (N1-N3)	12,537	35,445	125,096
NATED (N4-N6)	14,925	91,385	234, 528
Public FET College Total⁴³	184,018	265,452	657,690

Source: DHET, 2014

⁴² Taylor (2011) notes that of 55,000 new learners registering for the NCV in 2009, and over half (29 000) already have the NSC. In a survey of 18 131 FET students in 2010, over half were found to already have an NSC (Grewer, 2010 as cited in Taylor, 2011), however, in the latter survey, it's unclear how many of the pupils were enrolled in N4-N6 courses.

⁴³ Includes enrollment in other programs not included in this table

A note on NATED programs: NATED is the other major course of study offered by FET colleges. NATED is a vocationally focused program which culminates in a diploma. Admission into NATED N4-N6 courses usually requires an NSC or an NCV. Admission to N1-N3 courses varies by college. When the NCV was introduced, enrollment in NATED N1-N3 courses declined sharply; however, NATED enrollment has since rebounded. In the White Paper, DHET announces that it has halted the phase-out of N1-N3 engineering programs. There remains policy and implementation confusion about the current status and future of NATED programs.

Curriculum and certification. As noted earlier, the NCV is a general course of study. FET college programs align with what is traditionally understood as vocational education and training with programs organized into four main certification areas: science, engineering and technology⁴⁴; business and management sciences⁴⁵; education and humanities. In the NCV, 50% of enrollments are in science, engineering and technology courses and 46% of enrollments were in business and management sciences courses (Sheppard & Sheppard, 2009).

Quality and dropout. The FET colleges seek to respond to increased demand for “second-chance” opportunities to complete secondary education and increased demand for post-secondary education. This means that pupils entering FET colleges may be poorly prepared for NCV and post-secondary level courses in terms of foundational academic knowledge and skills and study habits. As FET college learners are often older than NSC counterparts, many have responsibilities outside of school such as family care and income-generation responsibilities. Taylor (2011) notes that incoming FET college students are generally comprised of two groups,

Those who passed the NSC but were unable to enter HE [Higher Education] because of low matric scores, and those who either failed matric or dropped out in Grades 10 or 11. In other words, their foundation skills in language and mathematics are likely to be the lowest of the 1 million cohort which entered Grade 12 years ago, and these students are ill-equipped to study at level 4. (p. 47)

⁴⁴ This field of study includes civil engineering and building construction; drawing office practice; electrical infrastructure and construction; engineering and related design; process plant operations; information technology and computer science; mechatronics; primary agriculture; and process instrumentation.

⁴⁵ This field of study includes finance, economics and accounting; hospitality; management; marketing; office administration; and tourism.

While enrollment has been growing, NCV learners show a high rate of drop out within and between levels (see Table 10). For learners who do not dropout and write leaving exams, around 60% fail. In NCV level 2 and level 3 courses, 47% and 36% learners entering the level did not write exams. If you compare pass rates to learners entered, you find that only 23% and 28% of learners entering levels 2 and 3 respectively passed the level (DHET, 2014). If success is measured by internal efficiency and pass rates, then the NCV appears to have extensive ground to cover. DHET efforts and results on access are clear. In 2013, 192,810 students at FET colleges received a total of 1.8 billion Rand in loans or bursaries from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Nearly all learners I spoke with spoke to the importance of the bursary in helping them attend the NCV program.

Table 10: NCV Enrollment and pass rates by level (2012)

	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Entered	73,044	28,017	18,607
Wrote	38,792	18,305	15,334
Passed	16,517	7,663	6,018
Passed (%)	42.6%	41.9%	39.3%

Source: DHET 2014

System wide data on the quality of the teaching force is not accessible, however, small studies (identified in Cloete, 2012; DHET, 2012; Taylor, 2011) indicate that a significant share of lecturers in FET colleges (30-60%, depending on the discipline) do not have a university qualification or training in teaching. These concerns are echoed in the DHET Green Paper (2012), which identifies the capacity of lecturers (especially subject matter expertise) as the “single greatest challenge in improving and expanding the colleges” (p. 24). Addressing poor pupil preparedness and strengthening the capacity of lecturers are both recognized as long term challenges. DHET (2012) notes,

The NCV curriculum is currently under review, with a view to strengthening it as the main route for general vocational education. The DHET is committed to the NCV. The value in general vocational learning is that it strengthens young people’s broad educational capacities – the ability to communicate well, to learn through the medium of a chosen language, and to use basic mathematical skills –

while allowing access to learning in a hands-on way about areas identifiably related to some aspect of the working world. (p.22)

Acknowledging the dilemma of attracting grade 9 leavers and NSC holders, cohorts with quite different learning needs, DHET is considering several reform possibilities, including provision of shorter courses for NSC holders interested in NCV content.

Graduation and through-put. While FET colleges issued nearly 100,000 certificates in 2009, this represents a certification rate of about 40% of all eligible candidates. A learner may qualify for certification each year of study (e.g., NCV2, or N4), so this means that in 2009, 60% of learners either failed qualification exams, or did not complete sufficient course work to qualify for certification. Of the cohort which started the new NCV program in 2007, only 4% had graduated by the end of 2009 (Sheppard & Sheppard, 2012).⁴⁶ While through-put is a concern, other voices question whether, especially at higher levels of education, improving the speed of degree completion is a critical priority. Sheppard and Sheppard (2012) argue that “whilst the preparedness of students is being improved incrementally, huge investments for academic support would be needed to ensure that the success rate, graduation rates and throughput rates can be improved” (p. 97).

Transition to further education. The NCV is still experiencing growing pains: NSC holders entering NCV programs receive no credit toward their NCV, despite their previous course work (which Sheppard and Sheppard, 2012 suggest “translates to repeating three years of already-completed schooling”) and the status of N4-N6 programs (i.e., Will they be continued? Will N4-N6 credits transfer to other college and university programs?) is uncertain. DHET (2012) notes that one of the most serious challenges facing NCV programs is that universities do not normally admit NCV graduates “even if their marks are good, unless there is a specific agreement between a particular university and the FET college where the student completed their NCV” (p. 23). The Green Paper

⁴⁶ Successful candidates in N1-N3 and N4-N6 courses 41% and 40%, respectively in 2009. The throughput rate for the National Certificate (Vocational) refers to the percentage of students who entered this programme and successfully completed it in the minimum time of three years. The graduation rate of the N1–N6 programmes refers to the percentage of graduates produced in a particular year as a percentage of the enrollments in that particular year. The drop-out rate in colleges is estimated to range between 13% and 25% per annum, the highest levels being evidenced in Level 2 of the NCV. (DHET, 2012)

is emphatic that the NCV must be able to lead to further qualification, education, and training and resolves to work toward realization of this goal.

Transition to the world of work. There are few tracer studies of FET graduates. Grever (2009, as cited in Powell & Lolwana, 2011) finds that of 1,532 graduates of FET colleges in Gauteng “FET colleges have a limited impact on the rate of employment, in particular the rate of relevant employment” (p. 17). Other studies are nearly a decade old and suggest that from half to two-thirds of FET graduates fail to find a job within six-months of graduation and that the perceived poor quality of South African schooling, particularly schools in the formerly black South African schooling system, reduce demand for college graduates (see Powell & Lolwana, 2011).

Part of the challenge in determining quality is based on the complexity of purposes different stakeholders give to the NCV program, as well as to the placement of the NCV program within the broader structure of education in South Africa. The majority of NCV interviewees see the NCV as a stepping stone to further education. Taylor (2011) suggests that many NCV students are collecting a bursary and simply “marking time” while they wait to get into university or the workplace. This sentiment is echoed by many of my interviewees. The purpose of the NCV may be different for matric holders, for those who do not have a matric, and for students who are older and have been out of the education system for some time. If matric holders are in fact “marking time”, they are doing so in an environment which may support their development in an occupational area and results in a qualification. For non-matric holders, the second-chance afforded by the NCV to get a level four qualification offers them a ticket to pursue further education. Two older learners in the Office Administration said they expected to work, at least part time, after completing the NCV. Some learners simply want to get a job. One learner in civil engineering said that many of her peers leave the FET College after successfully completing their level 2 exams because they are able to transition to semi-skilled work. The final section reflects on social constructions of purpose.

Social constructions of “purpose”

In considering the purpose and reform of the NSC and the NCV, Wedekind (2013) suggests that we step back and consider the “historical future”, that is, the future

imagined by education policymakers in the mid-1990s. At the time, Wedekind argues, education policymakers considered Grade 9 to mark the end of basic education and envisioned grades 10-12 (NQF levels 2-4) as a time for specialization in a particular academic stream or occupational area. The envisioned model fits neatly with the two paths paradigm of secondary education: that it prepares learners for university or the world of work. Wedekind argues, though less convincingly from my perspective, that policymakers believed that the majority of learners would be “found” in vocational streams since at the time, universities could only cater to a small segment of secondary leavers.

The envisioned future, however, turned out to be “quite different to what eventually unfolded” (Wedekind, 2013, p.7). Reform and consolidation of the apartheid-era post-school education system and establishment of the FET colleges happened slowly: over a period of two decades. First envisioned in the mid-1990s, the NCV only started being offered in 2007. For these two decades, the main educational path for Grade 9 leavers was into Grade 10 at an academic secondary school. From this entry point, the main exit point of the schooling system, Grade 12, was mediated by a leaving exam designed to differentiate learners based on perceived readiness for different types of university study.

Wedekind (2013) offers a schematic for understanding the NSC, indicating that it serves multiple purposes, for multiple audiences. For learners and parents, the NSC is a *marker* of secondary school completion and a *ticket* to further education, preferably to university.⁴⁷ All NSC learners I interviewed indicated interest continuing their studies at university. All but two NCV learners indicated a similar interest. Higher education institutions and employers may look at an NSC pass as a *signal* of an individual’s general knowledge, skill, and maturity and at NSC performance as a differentiator of individuals in terms of their overall performance and their performance in specific subjects. Table 11 relates “purposes” with “interest groups.” If we look at a third group, whom Wedekind identifies as “decision-makers,” politicians and senior civil servants, then the NSC purpose seems to become more muddled. Wedekind (2013, p.12) argues

⁴⁷ The terms “marker”, “ticket”, “signal” and “differentiator” are not used by Wedekind. I use these terms as descriptors of purpose.

that decision-makers are concerned with “public perceptions, resource allocation, system stability and personal performance measures.” A review of NSC policy and planning documents (and some of my interviews) suggests that policymakers are concerned about such issues in terms of the extent to which education contributes to national development, economic growth, and unemployment reduction.

Table 11: Purposes of the NSC and the NCV

	Learners / parents	HEIs / employers
Purpose	A <i>marker</i> signifying completion of secondary school	A <i>signal</i> of general knowledge, skill and maturity
	A <i>ticket</i> to further education	A <i>differentiator</i> of different types of learners

We can extend this framework to consider the NCV. For the NCV, the *signal* may be expected to more strongly indicate “occupationally specific” knowledge and the *ticket*, from the perspectives of policy-makers, more strongly associated with transition to the world of work. However, even if we recognize these pronounced policy purposes, many learners and lecturers I interviewed consider the NCV as a marker, a signal and an “occupationally specific” ticket to further education. These constructions of the NSC and the NCV align with the neoliberal policy discourse: secondary education is measured and valued for instrumental reasons, the extent to which it provides access to further education and the world of work. The next chapter elaborates on this discussion by situating secondary education within the social and historical context of South Africa and identifying some of the major debates surrounding education reform.

Chapter 6: Secondary education in South Africa – reform discourses

This chapter seeks to situate secondary education within the broader historical, social and economic context of South Africa. The first section identifies two discourses influencing education reform over the past decade. The second section provides a brief social and economic history of South Africa and links this history to the major debates on education during South Africa's transition to democracy. The next two sections trace how reform discourses are manifested in academic secondary schools and FET colleges. Section five shares perspectives championing reform from within the dominant paradigm and section six identifies perspectives which argue that a new construction of secondary education is needed. In the final section I offer some reflections which played a role in helping me frame this research.

Two reform discourses

Since South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, one can trace two distinct discourses influencing the debate on secondary education and skills development. The dominant perspective draws on neoliberal economic thought and human capital theory. The dominant perspective argues that human capital formation will promote South Africa's economic growth and global competitiveness while also reducing unemployment, poverty, and inequality. John Pampallis (2012), an advisor to Minister of Higher Education argues that such an agenda will meet the developmental needs of South Africa, noting:

Developing the scarce skills needed by our economy, and extending this type of training to previously disadvantaged groups, should not be equated with simply trying to meet the needs of the business. Rather, it is meeting the needs of the South African economy which we all rely on to provide the resources necessary for ending poverty and unemployment. In addition to big business, all employers - including the state, state-owned enterprises, the co-operative and non-governmental organisation sectors and small business - will benefit from a more skilled workforce. Even more importantly, those who develop their abilities and become skilled workers will benefit. (p. 1)

Recent DBE policy documents echo the skills discourse in arguing for an increased emphasis on mathematics and science and in emphasizing the importance of increasing

NSC pass rates (so that more learners will go to university and, later on, contribute to the economy). Critics argue that neoliberal policy discourse has been, and remains, the dominant influence on education reform priorities in South Africa over the past 20 years (Vally & Spreen, 2010a; Vally & Motala, 2014).

The second reform discourse argues that education, first and foremost, should support progress toward social justice and transformation in South Africa. This vision is embodied in the preamble of the South African Schools Act (1996) which states that “the achievement of democracy in South Africa has consigned to history the past system of education which was based on racial inequality and segregation” and articulates that the country,

requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people’s talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic wellbeing of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, [and] uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators. (p. 1)

This chapter provides some background on these discourses and discusses their influence on present constructions of secondary education in South Africa.

South Africa: A brief history to 1994

From the founding of the Cape Colony in 1652, and up to the mid-1800s, racist ideologies, capitalist exploitation, and unequal power exercised through violence supported the expansion of Afrikaner and English-speaking settlers through modern day South Africa. Geographic separation, segmentation of education and labor, and separate treatment under political and justice systems (all of which was inferior for Black South Africans) intensified in the mid to late 1800s with the expansion of legal frameworks stipulating separate treatment of black and white South Africans. Black South Africans were progressively dispossessed of land and other rights. With the development of the diamond and gold mining industries in the late 1800s, laws were passed which effectively forced black South Africans to provide cheap labor for industry. Denial of rights, violence, inhuman and undignified treatment, and development of separate education

models of and for black South African were justified by hegemonic discourses affirming and legitimizing European superiority in all aspects of life, work, and knowledge from the late 1800s.⁴⁸ Before the election of the Nationalist Party in 1948, reports serving as platforms for two different political parties (the Fagan Report and the Eislen Report) largely comported with the idea of continuing with Native Education policy established in the 1920s. This meant creating separate, inferior educational institutions for the black South Africans and preparing black South Africans for a subordinate place in the colonial economy (Lancaster, 2008).

Over the next thirty years, and following the enactment of the Bantu Authorities Act (1951), the Native Laws Amendment Act (1952) and the Bantu Education Act (1953), each initial steps in the articulation of the National Party policy of separate development, black South Africans (80% of the population) were increasingly ghettoized on 20% of the land. Black South Africans were forcibly relocated to rural Bantustans with unproductive farmland and townships outside urban centers and near industry areas. Black South Africans, increasingly integrated into the wage economy, were coerced to participate in labor arrangements benefitting industries and households owned by white South Africans.⁴⁹

Ripples of hope, from the creation of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912, established to work toward the development of a non-racial democracy, and the growth of the Black Consciousness Movement, founded to resist oppressive discourse and foster a culture of positive values (self-reliance, self-respect, and self-consciousness) and solidarity among black South Africans, offered glimpses of possibility for a yet to be realized democracy. In 1960, Robert Sobukwe organized a protest against pass laws. Pass laws required South Africans to carry pass books at all times and severely restricted the movements of black South Africans. In a confrontation related to the protest, police in Sharpeville, shot and killed 69 protesters – many of them in the back. Shortly after the

⁴⁸ Prior to establishment of Apartheid, what was known as the “Shepstone model” encouraged geographically separate settlement of black and white South Africans. In the early 1900s, the Land Act of 1913 and the Establishment of Pass Laws, disposed black South Africans of good farming land and outlawed the residence (but encouraged the employment) of black South African laborers in growing urban areas.

⁴⁹ Lancaster (2008) references Seekings and Nattrass (2007) who note that, together, the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 essentially destroyed the African peasantry and coerced Africans into wage labor.

Sharpeville massacre, the ANC, formerly committed to non-violent protest, formed an armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (spear of the nation, in Zulu). For the next thirty years, the ANC carried out armed attacks and bombings against what they recognized as the illegitimate apartheid government. From the late 1960s, and up until the late 1980s, student protests, both violent and non-violent, the adoption of violence by the ANC, increasing global condemnation of the apartheid government, and corresponding isolation and economic stagnation, made the “separate development” policy of the National Party increasingly difficult to maintain. In the early 1990s, a series of negotiations including representatives from the National Party, the ANC, and various other stakeholders laid the groundwork for a democratic election. In April 1994, the ANC won the presidency and the National Party joined the ANC in a government of national unity.

From the 1950s and up to the mid-1990s, secondary education was racially segregated in South Africa.⁵⁰ Segregation was accompanied with a racialized discourse which argued that “traditional cultures” learned better through a hands-on approach associated with vocational education as opposed to academic and abstract approaches to education (Kraak, 2002 on the 1981 De Lange commission). Segregation was also associated with unequal distribution of resources: schools serving black South Africans had poor infrastructure, insufficient learning materials, and poorly trained teachers. Characterizing education in South Africa at the time of transition, Chisholm (2012) notes,

Massive inequalities in every aspect of educational provision combined with high levels of poverty resulted by 1994 in an inheritance of deep differences between black and white educational provision in school resourcing, infrastructure, teacher quality and post-school and employment futures. The principal legacies that new policy in the post-apartheid period accordingly intended to address included (i) The racially segregated and unequal financing, organization and provision of education; (ii) poor quality of education for black people; (iii) high youth unemployment and (iv) low levels of participation in adult, technical and higher education. (p. 89)

Policy guiding secondary school reform

One of the first challenges to the social justice agenda took place during the period of South Africa’s transition to democracy. While supporting the racial integration

⁵⁰ The Bantu Education Act (1953) provided the legal foundation for provision of separate educational facilities for black South Africans and the Education and Training Act (1979), which replaced the Bantu Education Act, continued this system of racially segregated education.

of some schools, the establishment of Model C schools and provisions in the South African Schools Act (1996) supporting the establishment of school governing boards and the charging of school fees played a role in re-constituting class divisions in South Africa. In the early 1990s, the apartheid government transferred school property to school governing boards in several all-white schools. The boards were allowed to choose a model of integration which allowed them to continue exclusionary practices through admissions requirements based on language proficiency and fee structures (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Establishment of Model C schools and allowing school governing boards to establish fee structures is argued to have stemmed white flight from the public system during the apartheid transition. The reforms provided new opportunities for some black South Africans, but also reinforced class structures and did little to help the poor areas which had languished under apartheid (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Grant-Lewis & Motala, 2004; Lancaster, 2008). Spreen and Vally (2010a) argue that even with the emergence of a black middle class, schooling and labor structures have supported the reconstitution and reproduction of class inequalities. Of the distribution of school financing in South Africa today, Taylor (2011, p. 9) notes, “although non-personnel funding received by schools is pro-poor, schools in more affluent communities remain better resourced due to the practice of charging school fees.”

During and shortly following the transition to the new democracy in 1994, the education sector “saw a major demobilization of mass organizations in education” (Chisholm, 2012, p. 89) and a profound shift in policy “from the original egalitarian premises established by the democratic movement in the early 1990s (namely ‘peoples’ education’ aimed at equity and redress) and toward an embrace of elitist policies driven by neoliberal market ideology” (Spreen & Vally, 2010a, p. 438). Neoliberal policies were enacted in an atmosphere of high inflation, political uncertainty, and negative GDP growth (1990-1993) and educational restructuring from 1994-1999 took place in a context of severe fiscal constraint. Spreen and Vally (2010a), Vally and Spreen (2006), and Motala and Pampallis (2001) identify the tension between equity and redress and neoliberal economic and educational policies (e.g., emphasis on human resource development, global skills, international standards and accountability) as one of the central features of the policy environment during the first decade of democracy.

Outcomes Based Education. The experience of designing and implementing a new curriculum (called Curriculum 2005 and frequently referred to as Outcomes Based Education) in 1997 exemplifies the tensions between neoliberal and social justice discourses. Stoffels (2008) describes Outcomes Based Education as follows:

The new emphasis on ‘outcomes’ instead of input, on learner-centredness instead of teacher-centredness, and on active instead of passive learning, signaled a revolutionary new way of teaching and learning in South African classrooms. Teachers were expected to have a more facilitative role, and to employ a variety of teaching and assessment strategies, based on learners’ experiences and needs. In the minds of the policy-makers, this would afford teachers greater autonomy, responsibility, and flexibility to plan and facilitate lessons. (p. 26)

Jansen and Christie, 1999 (as cited in Jansen & Taylor, 2003) characterize the introduction of OBE as,

[a] direct response to the apartheid curriculum variously described as teacher-centered, authority-driven, content-based, elitist, examination-based, and Eurocentric in orientation. The previous curriculum privileged formal knowledge and encouraged rote learning. It straight-jacketed students for university preparation, not recognizing the diverse interests and pathways actually pursued by the majority of students. (p. 37)

The new curriculum, as indicated in the introduction, sought to embody both the transformative, humanistic, justice oriented vision articulated in the South African Schools Act (1996) and the neoliberal growth agenda adopted by the government.

According to Spreen and Vally (2010b), the narrative of failure around the new curriculum is misplaced: in most schools, OBE was not really implemented, and furthermore, “the ‘value’ of OBE cannot be assessed or understood properly unless account is accorded to the day-to-day contextual realities of teaching and learning in South Africa, the continuing school inequalities, and issues related to the enormous ‘poverty gap’ across the schooling system” (p.39).

An internal review of implementation of the new curriculum in 2000 concluded that “the complexity of the structure and design of the curriculum had compromised the implementation of C2005. Furthermore, poor departmental support to teachers, weak support of teacher training, tight timelines, the lack of enough learning support materials, and the general lack of resources had negatively affected the implementation of C2005”

(Howie, 2002, p. 45). This critique is echoed by others who identify the challenges facing under-prepared and poorly supported teachers, many of whom whose training and lifetime of experience were during the apartheid, and the majority who were deployed in under-resourced schools in historically scarred communities. Several analyses point to these issues:

Policy rhetoric offered ‘idealised versions of teachers, students and parents as the state would like them to be’ without requiring the state to meet its obligation to deliver the support that would enable change. (Soudien, 2003, as cited in Spreen & Vally 2010a, p. 436)

... [Policy] ignores or downplays the real conditions in classrooms (often violent, overcrowded and lacking in basic material resources) in which teachers work and students are expected to learn. (Spreen & Vally, 2010b, p. 47)

The vast majority of teachers were educated under apartheid, they had little experience with learner-centred education, constructing curriculum or being empowered to engage in their own intellectual work to develop alternatives. (Spreen & Vally, 2010b, p. 48)

Teaching is viewed instrumentally in the sense that tangible acts (assessment) assume greater importance than pedagogical relationships...policies do not reach schools or even speak in the same language as teachers. (Jessop, 1997 as cited in Spreen & Vally, 2010b, p. 49)

Subsequent iterations of C2005 include the introduction of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS). A few of the teachers and learners I interviewed suggested that DBE stop introducing new curricula every few years.

Recent DBE policy documents appear to confirm the conclusion that neoliberal policy discourse retains a strong hold on education policy in South Africa. *The Ministerial Task Team Report on the National Senior Certificate* argues that, “South Africa should communicate a clear and unambiguous vision of its economic future and how it can be reached, and that *the education system be shaped by that vision*” (DBE, 2014a, p.13, emphasis mine). One of the latest in a long line of “Nation at Risk” reports, the *Task Team Report* identifies “widespread public and professional concerns” about the standard and quality of the NSC and of the need to strengthen national efforts to participate in a competitive “global knowledge economy.” The lodestar for this Task

Force is the developmental trajectory of South Korea (a relatively ethnically and linguistically homogenous country). What characteristics of the South Korean system does the Task Force desire that South Africa emulate? Fierce competition, high “NSC” standards, “work ethic,” and the goal of developing a “high proportion of PhDs per capita, essentially in key areas of science and technology.”⁵¹ In line with the skills discourse, the report argues of the “urgent need” for a NSC vocational track to be implemented in technical secondary schools (DBE, 2014a, p.5).

After I had completed my initial literature review and analysis of interview data, I decided to revisit documents from the Department for Basic Education and the Gauteng Department of Education so I could see the priorities they identified for Grade 10-12 learners. I reviewed the latest DBE and GDE Annual Performance Plans (DBE 2014c, GDE 2013), the DBE Annual Report (DBE, 2013) and the Ministerial Task Team Report on the NSC (DBE, 2014a), and identified four themes which cut across the documents. The themes are:

- *Physical Science and Mathematics.* In both the DBE and GDE Annual Performance plans, Goals 5 was “Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass Mathematics” and Goal 6 was “Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass Physical Science.” For Grades 10-12 learners, no other subjects are emphasized in these documents. The interest expressed in the mathematics and sciences included increasing the number of learners in science and mathematics, increasing learner performance and supporting teacher professional development in science and mathematics. As noted earlier, the Task Team Report wrote extensively on the importance of mathematics, science and technology for national development.
- *NSC pass rates and assessment.* Both DBE and GDE plans identify as a goal, “Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who become eligible for a Bachelor’s programme at a university.” To meet this goal, GDE emphasizes the importance of the Secondary School Improvement Programme, a test prep program for Grade

⁵¹ Much could be unpacked here: we could discuss the dehumanizing effects of South Korea’s cram schools, we could, making a nod to an interviewee’s reference to *Animal Farm* (See chapter 10), question the logic of “I will work harder” as the key to global competitiveness; or we could simply wonder whether all of the PhDs which South Africa seeks to produce will feel compelled to stay in their country of birth.

12 learners which takes place during school holidays and during Saturdays and Sundays. GDE identifies “preparing learners for the NSC” as the purpose of Grades 10-12. The Task Team Report argues for raising NSC pass requirements and strengthening school based assessment while the DBE annual report offers a goal of developing a world class system assessment.

- *Skills development.* Speaking to the two-paths model, GDE identifies one of the four goals of the education system as preparing learners to enter the world of work or further education. Recognizing that not all learners will enter university, DBE, GDE and the Task Team recommend improving skills development efforts at the secondary level. The Task Team offers the most ambitious program, recommending that DBE introduce the NCV into technical high schools.
- *Everything else.* Reports and plans also emphasize the importance of teacher professional development (though mostly in the sciences and mathematics), improving school management and providing a small amount of support to promote sports programs in schools and improve school safety.

The Task Force Report and recent DBE and GDE performance reports, in contrast to the South African Schools Act and social justice discourses, largely frame the purpose of academic secondary education within a neoliberal developmental framework. A later section provides additional discussion of how “reform” in secondary education is conceptualized from within the dominant paradigm. This next section traces reform of FET colleges and establishment of the NCV.

FET colleges and the NCV

The establishment FET colleges and the introduction of the NCV course have proceeded at a slow pace over the past two decades. Following enactment of the FET Act (1998), in 2002, 50 FET colleges were created through the merger of former technical colleges, colleges of education and training centers. In many cases, this merger placed post-school institutions which had previously been segregated by race under the same FET college administration. FET colleges are distributed across South Africa’s nine provinces and provide 248 campuses, many in low-income areas, including several townships. Several FET colleges include three, four or five campuses – many of which

represent post-school institutions with different apartheid histories. The Department for Higher Education and Training, led by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, was established in 2009 and consolidates all post-school education and training under one Ministry. Recent DHET policy statements, including a Green Paper (DHET, 2012) and a White Paper on Post School Education and Training (DHET, 2014), articulate government vision and policy direction related to FET colleges and the NCV.

The White Paper for Post School Education and Training states, “the DHET’s highest priority is to strengthen and expand public TVET colleges” which includes increasing headcount enrollment to one million by 2015 and 2.5 million by 2030 (DHET, 2014, p. xii).⁵² DHET (2014) envisions TVET college enrollment growth as playing a key role in addressing South Africa’s “acute skills shortages,” noting,

The main purpose of these colleges is to train young school leavers, providing them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for employment in the labour market. They primarily provide training for the mid-level skills required to develop the South African economy, and tend to concentrate on occupations in the engineering and construction industries, tourism and hospitality, and general business and management studies. (p.11-12).

The sentiments and priorities expressed in the White Paper identify with several concerns about the state of post-school education in South Africa. First, several critics, including DHET argue that the enrollment share between Universities and FET colleges is unbalanced. Cloete et al. (2012) note that universities enroll twice as many learners as do FET colleges. University and FET college enrollment stand at 950,000 and 400,000, respectively. DHET (2012) argues that “this ‘inverted pyramid’ is a major problem for our system and results in a workforce with serious shortages of artisanal and other mid-level skills” (p. 11). The second concern is that of the over 2.8 million youth who are in neither education, employment or training, over 700,000 are qualified to participate in some form of post-secondary education (Cloete et al., 2012). At present, there is insufficient space available in institutions of higher education to absorb these potential students. DHET’s response to both concerns is to rapidly expand access to newly created FET colleges, including enrollment in the NCV course. Taylor (2011) expresses concern at the enrollment push by DHET and argues that the “priority must be to improve

⁵² Both targets have been identified as unrealistic (Sheppard and Sheppard, 2012; Cloete, 2012).

institutional capacity and throughput before loading them [FET colleges] with additional demands” (p. 44). DHET argues that there is not enough time, that the presence of over 3.4 million youth (ages 15-24) were not in education, employment or training (constituting over 32.9 % of persons in this age groups) mean that it must simultaneously focus on access AND quality.

The Pampallis quotation shared at the beginning of this chapter conveys the ethos of the White Paper: if FET colleges provide skills, skills will produce economic and employment growth and growth will deliver on broader developmental priorities, included those associated with social justice. In speaking to the goals of FET colleges, the White Paper acknowledges that “the majority of South Africans have still to attain a decent standard of living. Most black people are still poor; they are still served by lower-quality public services and institutions (including public educational institutions) than the well-off,” (DHET, 2014, p.4). This is how DHET articulates one of the developmental challenges facing South Africa. However, five pages later, DHET argues that it is unable to change the consequences of neoliberal policies. Recognizing the impact of high structural unemployment the White Paper states,

This situation means that we are providing training for individuals who will not, in the foreseeable future, be able to find formal employment in existing enterprises. To make a living, they will have to create employment opportunities in other ways – by starting small businesses in the informal or formal sector, or by establishing cooperatives, community organisations or non-profit initiatives of various types. (DHET, 2014, p.9)

Later on, acknowledging sluggish demand for workers, DHET (2014) argues that the practical training offered in the NCV is useful since work placement is hard to find. It later notes, “most of the [N1-N3] students no longer spend time in workplaces, because of difficulties in finding opportunities in the labour market” (p. 14). These statements, inadvertently, one suspects, points to an area of rupture in the skill discourse. The DHET argues in favor of supply-side skills expansion as a solution to various social ills, and yet when articulating the challenges facing transition from education to employment, DHET accepts a neoliberal conceptualization of the economy. This is an agile move: the state is valorized for expanding historically disadvantaged populations’ access to education and at the same time is absolved of responsibility for changing a political economy which

perpetuates disadvantage and marginalization as well as high levels of poverty, insecurity, and unemployment.⁵³

The White Paper acknowledges that the NCV is a bit of a muddle. The NCV, originally designed as a vocational program for non-academically oriented students and a second chance program for non-NSC holders, is increasingly absorbing learners who have passed the NSC. This is related, in part, to the lack of space at universities. In addition, the NCV, originally designed for work-force development and transition to employment, is instead mainly serving as a stepping stone to further education and seen by many as producing unemployable graduates. As noted in the previous chapter, critics argue that NCV learners are simply marking time and that FET colleges are warehousing youth. The White Paper is canny about the future of the NCV. It suggests that FET colleges will shift toward focusing on providing higher level qualifications (e.g., NQF Level 5, certificate). In addition, the White Paper acknowledges that DBE efforts to recapitalize and reform technical secondary schools, including potentially offer the NCV in secondary schools, may lead DHET to rethink its role in providing level 2-4 skills development. Regardless of where the NCV lands, DHET's makes clear its priorities, increasing access to post school education, and its conceptual grounding, the skills discourse.

Reform within the dominant paradigm

The previous two sections offer a brief overview of reform discourses associated with academic secondary schools and FET colleges. The next two sections discuss some of the debates on education reform. I first discuss debates which are framed within the dominant discourse and then follow with an overview of debates which call for a new construction of secondary education.

Most of the discourse on education reform in South Africa generally accepts the existing paradigm of education and schooling and argues that the state must “manage” schools to improvement. In secondary education, reform prescriptions may include progressive resourcing policies (e.g., no-fee schools, or ensuring the provision of adequate teaching and learning materials), a focus on improving learners’ cognitive skills

⁵³ N.b. social ills are associated with South Africa’s history of apartheid and patriarchy as opposed to grounded in a critique of capitalism and neoliberal conceptions of the state.

and matric pass rates (e.g., by focusing on improving teachers' subject matter knowledge, increasing assessment, increasing time on task and reducing absenteeism, and improving school management and instructional leadership) and improving accountability. Spaul (2012) argues of a need "to focus on the basics," mastery of numeracy and literacy, while Crouch (2005) argues that improving the cognitive performance of the poor requires, "use of better, more rigorous pedagogical models, more and better standards of performance, ... better management of mother tongue initial education and transition to the lingua franca, and more time on task" (p.25).

The "Schools that Work" study commissioned by the Department for Basic Education offers one example of how school improvement within an "as is" model is conceived (Christie, Butler, & Potteron, 2007). The report acknowledges that the majority of schools in South Africa are black schools in relatively poor socioeconomic circumstances, with pupils learning in English rather than their home language, and in a learning environment where the facilities (e.g., laboratories, libraries, computers, sports fields, extra-curricular activities) which make learning and school a joy, rather than a chore, are noticeably absent. In the review of eighteen secondary schools serving poor communities and selected based on having good NSC results, the Schools that Work study (Christie et al., 2007) found,

- All of the schools were focused on their central tasks of teaching, learning, and management with a sense of responsibility, purpose and commitment;
- All of the schools carried out their tasks with competence and confidence;
- All had organizational cultures or mindsets that supported a work ethic, expected achievement, and acknowledged success;
- All had strong internal accountability systems in place, which enabled them to meet the demands of external accountability, particularly in terms of Senior Certificate achievement. (p. 5)

While acknowledging the complexity of South African history and the pervasive inequalities in the current socio-economic environment, Jonathan Jansen, Vice Chancellor at the university of the Free State and former Dean of the Faculty of Education at the university of Pretoria argues that the success of secondary schools is tied to school leadership. In *How to Fix South Africa's Schools (2014)*, Jansen and Blank profile nineteen schools in poor, remote or otherwise marginalized communities, which show consistently high NSC pass rates. Some of the words and phrases Jansen and Blank

use to describe the profiled schools make clear their belief that education must be embedded in high expectations, a sense of community and a culture of support and positive values. After reading Jansen and Blank, I re-read the nineteen profiles of the schools they identified and compiled the below list of characteristics they identified in these schools. They include: character, vision, community, pride, citizenship, upliftment, a values-based society, school as a second home, make learners feel valuable about themselves, respect, positive responses to failure, support to struggling learners, self-confidence, ambition, motivation, discipline, beacon of hope, role model, balanced society, aspiration, learners becoming the “man or woman they want to be”, holistic learner and getting learners to “believe in themselves.”

Jansen and Blank find that “some pupils cannot imagine a future beyond their dismal situation,” they rail against “loveless learning,” and they state that learning is an emotional experience AND a cognitive process. Jansen characterizes one school he visits as a “little oasis in the measurement desert of performance based education,” (2014, p. 114). The school has strong NSC results, but what Jansen identifies as more important is an environment of caring, compassion and belonging, one where everyone matters. One of my interviewees spoke highly of Jansen’s work and offered examples from her experience of how dedicated staff can make a difference in schools and communities. She notes:

One principal...I know that he’s also got a heart for the child...he has realized when children leave the school yard there is nobody to go home to. So they are roaming the streets. In any case teachers are going to have a headache in getting these children to produce homework so what he has done is that he has opened the school even for ex-students who are studying at FET colleges, his school is basically open. All classes are open and they can just come into the classrooms and study there ...he has even invited his grade 8 & 9 students to say don’t go home after school. He has arranged through [a] nutrition program to say there will be something else even if it’s only one or two extra fruits for the children to come and have something to eat and then they go to class.

Of course it’s not all children who buy into this but the majority of these children are doing it and in any case the majority of the educators will be on the premises until 3 o’clock to calm down the environment. What he says is that he has seen a difference in how grade 8 & 9 and even grade 10 children are behaving because of the student, the student that came from the [FET college] ...he’s actually the cool guy and what he is actually doing is studying so they are an example that you

can actually do this. I'm doing this. I think in this way there are people who are trying to make a difference.

...another principal she has made plans in terms of children that are over aged. In grade 9 some of them being 17, 18, some of them being aged 20. She has realized there is no future for them so she has networked with outside companies to say how can she get these children tested and to get them... but that's a small, it's a drop in the ocean. It's not a big thing. (Policy 2)

Christie et al. (2007), Jansen and Blank (2014) and the individual I interviewed offer examples of successful schools and the importance of school leadership. Earlier in the interview, I ask (Policy 2) about the training offered to new school principals by the district. She laments that most principals in her district receive a "two-day induction" which covers mostly DBE administrative matters about which new principals need to be made aware.

On FET Colleges and the NCV program, there is a neomanagerialist reform discourse. One of my colleagues describes this also as a "descriptive institutionalist" perspective. The descriptive institutionalists do not question the conceptualization, or theoretical underpinnings of the FET colleges, but rather argue that if we get the implementation "right," then institutions will meet the goals outlined in the White Paper. From the perspective of DHET (2014), key reform priorities in FET colleges include,

improving access, throughput rates, management capacity (especially with regard to planning, and financial and human resource management), student support services and student accommodation, as well as developing management information systems, strengthening governance, building partnerships with employers and other stakeholders, increasing the responsiveness of colleges to local labour markets, improving placement of college graduates in jobs, and creating a mix of programmes and qualifications that will meet the varied needs of students. (p. 12)

Allais (2012), McGrath (2012b) and Wedekind (2014) associate preferencing skills development and associated policy tools (e.g., qualifications frameworks, quality assurance systems, and large scale governance reforms) as emblematic of neoliberal and developmental states. Skills are defined with reference to market needs (e.g., drawing on concepts of "employability" and "responsiveness") and assessment and evaluation systems are centerpieces of reform efforts. Allais instead argues that DHET focus on building "strong institutions, curricula, and lecturers" (Allais, 2012, p. 640).

I have seen a few small-scale reform initiatives directed at FET colleges. The British Council has sponsored a “skills for employability” program which has supported partnership development between six FET colleges in South Africa with colleges in the UK. There are also several small scale initiatives in which particular industries (e.g., the steel, Iscor; energy, Sasol; and automotive, Ford; industries) have developed small-scale partnerships and programs with specific colleges, universities and Sector Education and Training Authorities (DHET, 2014; Stuart, 2014). However, to echo comments in a previous section, these efforts are a drop in the ocean: they support training or job placement for less than 100,000 students. Such partnership, training, and work exposure may well be valuable for youth and businesses; however it is equal to less than two percent of the total population (seven million) of unemployed, discouraged, and underemployed workers. Even so, the reform discourse continues to identify skills development as the solution to South Africa’s high unemployment and poverty. While critical of FET colleges and the NCV, Grever, as quoted in City Press (2012), who comes from a descriptive institutionalist perspective, states, “it’s not any more or less depressing than the schooling system but we have to make it work. We don’t have a choice.”⁵⁴

Calls for social justice and transformation

To many critics, education remains narrowly conceived and rigidly structured: an obstacle course of tests directing a select few to elite status and wealth, a poor fit to the lived realities of the majority of students and teachers, and a conservative institution of discursive practices and hierarchical relationships which discourage democratic participation and voice (Chisholm, 2012; Jansen, 2009; Spreen & Vally, 2010a). These same critics question the extent to which understandings of knowledge, curriculum, and schooling and the roles of teacher and learner have changed in the new democracy and seek to identify how anti-democratic schooling and management practices have been contested, transformed or reproduced in the post-apartheid era. (Samoff, 2008; Soudien & Gilmore, 2008; Spreen & Vally, 2010a; Weber, 2008;). From a social justice perspective, dropout and academic failure does not elicit a call for a back to the basics approach focused on improving assessment performance (though improvement of pupils cognitive

⁵⁴ <http://www.citypress.co.za/news/young-jobless-and-desperate-will-fet-colleges-fix-our-future-20120623/>

skills is certainly recognized as valuable), but rather is an indictment of an unequal society and a schooling system, which by design, perpetuates inequality and academic failure.

Advocates for social justice may conceptualize education as socially constructed. The constructivist critique points to different goals, values, and possibilities which can be made manifest, in part, through education. Alexander (2013) argues that we re-position education to focus on the fulfillment of human potential for all and, echoing Steven Biko (2004), argues that schools should play a role in developing a culture of positive values (e.g., self-respect, self-consciousness, self-reliance). Samoff (2008) echoes this sentiment, arguing for the need to broaden the scope of education to include critical reasoning, cooperative approaches, community responsiveness, environmental awareness, self-confident assumption of responsibility, and engaged citizenship. Critics of the dominant discourse may identify possibilities in schools as sites for rupturing “elite” structures and creating a new social reality of respect for diversity, purposeful integration, and national healing. Jansen (2009), Nkomo (2008) and Vandeyar (2008) identify possibilities for racial integration and post-conflict pedagogies in South African secondary schools and tertiary institutions.

Included in the critique of the dominant paradigm is the argument that a new vision for education cannot be considered separately from a critique of capitalist structures and efforts to create a new society: a non-racial, democratic republic free of capitalist exploitation and racist oppression, defined by the values of freedom, equality, solidarity, and democracy and in opposition to attempts to divide the population on the basis of language, religion, tribe or caste, (Alexander, 2013; Motala & Vally, 2013). Alexander (2013) and Motala and Vally (2013) argue that a new moral narrative, uncorrupted by consumerism, avarice, and the glorification of ostentatious consumption is needed. Soudien and Gilmore (2008) write to the magnitude of this challenge. They note that in the new democracy efforts of social transformation through curriculum reform have not realized desired success in part because of the continued segmentation of the labor market, the extreme inequality between schools, and the lived experiences of teachers who understand knowledge, schooling and teaching as an elite-forming process.

Critics of FET college reform offer similar concerns. Allais (2012) argues that, “the South African experience exemplifies how difficult it is to develop robust and coherent skills development in the context of inadequate social security, high levels of job insecurity, and high levels of inequalities” (p.632). Of FET colleges, Wedekind (2009, as quoted in Powell, 2013) writes “much of the reform process cares little about understanding the people in the system ... as long as more staff and students are black and enrollments are increasing there is little more that needs to be considered” (p. 75-76). On this specific point, we need only look back forty years into the history of South Africa to find a word of caution. Chisholm (2012) notes, “between 1960 and 1975, the numbers of [black South] Africans in high schools increased seven-fold. Between 1975 and 1985, they trebled again. The numbers going through to matriculation (the highest school-leaving standard) increased even more startlingly. Between 1960 and 1984 there was more than a hundredfold increase” (p. 87). Crouch and Vinjevold (2006) note that the rate of expansion “is really quite unprecedented by international standards...we calculate that no country in the world expanded its secondary education access faster than SA’s African population, in the period 1970 to 1995” (p. 10). What has been the result of this rapid expansion of secondary education? What might we expect to be the result of this rapid expansion of access to FET colleges?

The focus on expansion and access minimizes the importance of what is actually learned at FET colleges and whose purposes FET colleges are meant to serve. What are some alternative conceptualizations for FET colleges? Motala (quoted in CERT, 2013, p. 3) notes, “the concept of [socially] ‘useful work’ may help in understanding what is being done by people in working class communities. This work involves community literacy, home care, pre-schooling, community gardening, school feeding schemes and many other activities.” Ngcwangu and Balwanz (2014) suggest that FET colleges could draw on humanistic and liberal arts traditions of local universities. Baatjes et al. (2014) and Hamilton (2014) identify similar possibilities for re-imagining adult and community education in ways which better respond to the interests and experiences of people living in working class and historically poor and marginalized communities.

Discussion

Initial chapters present my conceptual framework, provide background on varied human development perspectives, and discuss the utility of a political economy lens in analyzing debates on the relationship between education, work and, society. After discussing theoretical and conceptual issues, I locate these perspectives within the context of contemporary data and debates on secondary education and skills development globally and in South Africa. I recognize two distinct strands of thought, a neoliberal discourse and a social justice and transformation discourse, which influence social constructions of secondary education. What do I make of all of this? How might it inform my research?

The political economy perspective. I argue that there will come a time, if it hasn't already arrived, where the growth of college and university graduates (the path of most NSC and NCV learners) is not met with concomitant absorption into the labor market. Herein lies the dilemma of the dominant discourse explanation of the relationship between education, skills development, and politically economy. Between 1994 and 2014, the unemployment rate for black South Africans with a tertiary education increased from 8% to 19%. (n.b., across racial categories, the unemployment rate for individuals with a tertiary education is 14%) (Stats SA, 2014). A secondary school learner I interviewed speaks directly to this issue:

I don't know why they [unemployed youth] are sitting at home. And more and more people are now attending school. Each and everyone has a dream and they want to make it more successful. ...more people don't have jobs, but they still attend school making N1 and N2s. But no jobs. (SS Learner 6)

Collins (2013) offers a similarly bleak analysis. He notes that youth alienation from the labor market is,

Not so much a failure of mass secondary education to provide good technical skills (one hardly needs high school classes to greet customers politely or ship packages to the right address), as a pervasive alienation from doing menial work. The mass inflationary school system tells its students that it is providing a pathway to elite jobs, but spills most of them into an economy where menial work is all that is available unless one has outcompeted 80% of one's school peers. No wonder they are alienated. (p. 17)

The challenge of constructing and implementing a new vision. The recent history of education reform in South Africa evidences the significant influence of dominant discourses on shaping conceptualizations of and practices in education. Human capital, neoliberal, elitist and neomanagerial discourses continue to shape thinking, practice, and reform conceptualizations in the education sector. Alternative perspectives and constructions, exemplified by the vision of OBE, are popularly regarded as failures. As Spreen and Vally (2010a) suggest, not only do we need to recognize the extent to which historical disadvantage and structural inequality thwart OBE-like reform efforts, we must also support reform rhetoric with an ongoing focus on, in the words of Allais, building “strong institutions, curricula, and lecturers” (Allais, 2012, p. 640). Such shoring up is especially important in poor and historically marginalized communities.

I must admit, I puzzled quite a bit over the implications of Jansen and Blank’s *Schools that Work* book on my research: to what extent can efforts promoting the “holistic development of the child” coexist with efforts to meet DBE performance expectations? In my research, NSC learners speak of attending classes seven days a week, pervasive note-taking, test prep and exam taking and their exhaustion. Jansen and Blank identify similar phenomena (e.g., extra classes) but offer them as examples of dedicated and dynamic teachers pushing learners toward success (Jansen & Blank, 2014). What is interesting to me about Jansen and Blank’s examples of success is that success does not appear to be the result of neomanagerial reform and accountability efforts, but instead on isolated examples of school management and leadership, the collective dedication of teachers, creating sense of community and ensuring a caring and supportive environment. Perhaps Jansen and Blank are arguing that, in spite of the dehumanizing structures and incentives shaping education in South Africa today, creating a humanizing educational experience and environment remains possible.

Some possibilities and questions. The NCV course offers some refreshing differences from academic secondary education: it provides a more flexible curriculum while also emphasizing the development of foundational skills; it more explicitly recognizes that learners bring to school diverse interests, talents, and future directions and it acknowledges the different academic starting points of students. These differences, in

addition to some of the above reflections point to some questions which I continued to explore during my research. The questions include:

- *Why specialize so soon?* If most NSC and NCV learners see themselves pursuing another two to four years of further education at a post-school institution, what is the purpose of encouraging learners to specialize starting from Grade 10? It seems that for many learners, they are being pushed to specialize in the absence of strong foundational education and the likelihood that access to tertiary education and the labor market will elude them. Should a comprehensive model, with more flexibility and more opportunities in the liberal arts be considered? One which could better respond to the diverse perspectives and interests of teachers and learners and allow for the embodiment in schools and communities of other values, including those articulated in the South African Schools Act?

- *Why not place greater emphasis on addressing some of the challenges in secondary schools instead of focusing on second-chance education?* While there will likely always be a need for second-chance education, there is no reason why secondary schools can't be changed to reduce the need of so many learners (700,000+) for a second chance. The narrow, academic subject, theory only, NSC focus of secondary school appears to influence dropout and push-out of learners, several of them into FET colleges. Implementation of the NCV in technical secondary schools may provide a more meaningful and relevant secondary experience for a larger number of learners. Recall the R1.8 billion expenditure in 2012 in bursaries to FET college students: why not reach more learners, earlier, with something better?

Chapter 7: Methods

This chapter re-states the research questions, outlines the conceptual approach to understanding human development discourse at multiple levels, presents the methodological approach employed in this study, and provides detail on methods, data collection, data analysis, researcher positionality, ethics, and limitations of this research.

Research questions

As noted earlier, the purpose of this research is to elicit and compare perspectives on the purpose of secondary education. To organize my research, data collection and analysis, I have articulated my research objectives into four overarching questions:

Research Question 1: From the perspectives of teachers and learners in/from historically marginalized communities, what are the purposes of secondary education?

Research Question 2: How do teachers and learners in/from historically marginalized communities describe the experience of secondary school?

Research Question 3: What do teachers and learners in/from historically marginalized communities recommend changing about the existing model/vision of secondary education?

Research Question 4: How do perspectives of teachers and learners in historically marginalized communities compare with dominant global and national discourses on secondary education and skills?

Conceptual approach to understanding global-local discourses

The research questions and methods used to answer them are influenced by how one sees the world. My conceptual approach to understanding the global skills discourse draws on two models. The first model identifies the dialectic between the “global and the local” (Arnove & Torres, 2007) of how policy discourse is spread through and becomes situated in international and national policy discourses and documents. Several studies show how international discourses on education policy are drawn on and influence education policy at the national level and become inserted into national level policy documents and discourses (Kendall, 2007; Steiner-Khamisi, 2010; Vavrus & Seghers, 2010). Neo-institutionalists consider the global trend toward mass education and policy

forms and trends toward isomorphism as evidence of the development of a global culture of schooling (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000); a critical perspective may identify the influence of unequal power and discursive structures made manifest through international political-economic relationships. The *global skills discourse* is evident in South African education policy discourse insofar as the discourse identifies the importance of reviewing and potentially emulating global best practices (DHET, 2012; Stumpf et al., 2012), prioritizes neoliberal approaches to education reform, and prioritizes human development approaches geared to enhancing international competitiveness in the global economy (DHET, 2012; DBE, 2012a; Spreen & Vally, 2010a).

A second and related conceptual lens identifies possibilities of received discourses being adopted, transformed, and resisted in local contexts by communities, teachers and students (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; DeJaeghere et al., 2006; Kendall, 2007). Kendall (2007), referring to Anderson-Levitt notes, “locally structured policies, practices, and norms conflict with, transform, or function alongside globally structured ones.” She continues, “enacted policy differs from official policy...differences in lived experiences matter more than the common structure” (p.283). Less evidence on this is available in the South African context on the extent to which communities, teachers, and schools have adopted, transformed, or resisted skills discourses, or the extent to which experiences in school or communities privilege other skills, values, or agency-related approaches not identified in the skills discourse. In both cases, this conceptual lens allows me to consider actions and experiences at the local level as integrally connected to policy and discourse taking place at national and global levels. In the words of Kendall (2007), a multi-level analysis,

Reveals the many different forces, discourses, institutions, people, and environments that have shaped the interrelations between [areas of inquiry]...Multilevel analysis thus allows us to examine practices and institutions particular to one area, while capturing the complex networks and interrelations between these “local” practices and the “global” policies examined. (p. 290)

To be specific, this research situates its conceptualization of local perspectives on human development within a broader framework recognizing the dialectical influence of global and national policy discourses and the possibilities for transformation, resistance, and construction related to the skills discourse at local levels.

Methodology

This research draws on constructivist-interpretive and critical theoretical perspectives which articulate human understandings of truth and knowledge in the social sciences to be partial, contextual, and socially constructed and operating in a social environment structured by unequal power relations. These perspectives focus on understanding and making-meaning of subjective experiences and are positioned to identify the influence of marginalizing discursive practices. These approaches identify research as an iterative process of data collection and analysis which draw on inductive approaches and researcher reflexivity to provide “connections and insights...between another’s experience and one’s own” (Thomas, 2010 p. 570). The focus of this research is both exploratory and explanatory (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The research is exploratory insofar as there is little empirical research in South Africa which draws on the voices of youth and marginalized communities vis-à-vis education policy influenced by the skills discourse (Spren & Vally, 2010b). The research is explanatory insofar as it seeks to explain the experience of schooling from the perspectives of interviewees.

Stance toward theory, induction, policy influence. As noted above, this research is designed from a constructivist perspective and thus grounded in the understanding that there is no neutral standpoint or objective truth from which to discern the purpose of human development or value particular types of education. As such this research seeks to sincerely elicit, understand, and present different perspectives and experiences – with the understanding that such perspective builds “craft knowledge” relevant to the construction of education policy and the realm of academic discourse appearing in peer-reviewed literature. Thomas (2010) argues that the goal of the social scientific endeavor should be to develop “exemplary knowledge unselfconsciously based on abduction gained and offered through phronesis rather than through theory” (p, 576). Here abduction is “the development of an explanatory or theoretical idea”, or put another way, “a fluid understanding that explicitly or tacitly recognizes the complexity and frailty of the generalizations we can make about human interrelationships” (p. 577). Phronesis is “craft knowledge” and judgment developed through the research process designed to gather insight or understand a problem. Arguing along similar lines, Streek (2011, p. 140) offers a “heuristic checklist, to draw “attention to empirical phenomena that might be a

worthwhile explanandum” of a contemporary phenomenon.⁵⁵ This position draws on the work of Flyvbjerg (2006) and Thomas (2010) who argue that qualitative researchers too often overemphasize the importance of predictive theories and universals associated with the hypothesis-testing and theory-building to the detriment of valuing (i) concrete, context-dependent knowledge; (ii) the force of example; (iii) the development of fragile, explanatory, heuristics (for understanding social reality) and (iv) exploration of the multifaceted and often ambiguous nature of social reality.⁵⁶ This research stance recognizes the utility of inductive analytic strategies approaches to conceptualize and interpret data while acknowledging limitations given the “sheer contingency of social life and human agency” (Thomas, 2010, p. 577). While this perspective may seem to argue against efforts to “generalize” findings, one could instead argue that a case approach may provide insights on “what” is not generalizable as well as offer findings pertinent to new conceptualizations of problems or directions in reform. Evidence may also add to the existing body of case knowledge, perhaps confirming findings from earlier studies or adding a more nuanced understanding or perspective to prior findings.

I also draw on critical perspectives. Critical theorists argue that the social construction of reality is influenced by multiple oppressions, among them, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and post-colonial status. Power relations “normalize” some constructions (e.g., the colonialists brought civilization to Africa, heterosexual is normal, and men should be the breadwinners in the household) leading many critical theorists to argue that one’s version of reality is related to one’s power and position in society. Because of this lens, a critical researcher will emphasize uncovering partial truths (in line with post-modernism) and advancing social justice. According to a critical perspective, the researcher’s positionality is important since research can be a practice which either reinforces entrenched inequalities or works toward a more just community. A critical researcher must explicitly position him or herself with the less powerful as part of a joint effort to bring about social transformation. A critical theorist will argue that there is no neutrality and that even the most “neutral” of interpretative efforts is mired in biases which reflect dominant practices (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Mertens, 2010).

⁵⁵ Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) discuss “analytic generalizability” which they suggest mean that a study can provide a description of “social forms” by capturing the lived experiences of research participants.

⁵⁶ Denzin and Lincoln (2008) and Kvale (1994) elaborate on this perspective.

While there are areas of agreement and overlap between interpretative and critical perspectives, there are also tensions. For example, an ethno-methodological perspective seeks mainly to “understand” interviewees and their experiences at the micro-level. In contrast, a post-modern approach argues that all research takes place in an environment shaped by unequal power and that research should seek to uncover partial truths which challenge dominant ideologies (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In this research, I am trying to give voice to perspectives which are currently marginalized in the dominant discourse. My focus is mainly on class: economically poor students living in economically poor communities. The vast majority of people in South Africa who are poor, marginalized, or historically disadvantaged are black South Africans. All teachers and students interviewed are black South Africans; over half of my interviewees are female. That said this research does not interrogate issues of race and gender. If I had come from a critical race or a critical feminist perspective, I would have learned different “partial truths” with respect to how dominant constructions of secondary education relate to social constructions of and experiences related to race and gender. Instead, I am hopeful that this research identifies the holistic and human aspirations of subjugated classes, combats perspectives which argue for different types of education for different classes, and identifies the importance of valuing and nurturing the agency of teachers and learners to explore and create their own developmental paths as articulated from their perspectives. The relation of these lenses to issues of “quality” and policy-relevance are discussed below.

How do we identify “good” qualitative research? This methodology is grounded in a standard of trustworthiness as opposed to truth. A trustworthy standard is how the researcher can “persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1999, as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 48). This research seeks to provide a trustworthy account of the topic of inquiry by following eight criteria for qualitative research identified by Tracy (2010). The criteria are: (i) worthy topic, (ii) rich rigor, (iii) sincerity, (iv) credibility, (v) resonance, (vi) significant contribution, (vii) ethical and (viii) meaningful coherence. These criteria are presented, defined and discussed with

reference to this research in Table 12 below. I discuss credibility and reliability further, with reference to additional guidance on the practice of qualitative research.

Table 12: Eight criteria for qualitative research

Criteria for quality	Explanation	This case
Worthy topic	Topic is relevant, timely, significant, interesting	<i>Identifies policy discourse and dilemmas involving education and offers an alternative to a human capital focus</i>
Rich rigor (reliability)	Study utilizes sufficient and appropriate: theoretical constructs, data collection and analytical methods, time in the field, contexts	<i>Described in the Methods section</i>
Sincerity	The study is characterized by: reflexivity and researcher transparency	<i>See section on positionality, memoing and reflexivity</i>
Credibility	Study is marked by: thick description, triangulation, multi-vocality, member reflections	<i>Researcher will seek out diverse voices and member-check findings and interpretations iteratively</i>
Resonance	Research influences or effects audiences through: evocative representation, naturalistic generalizations, transferable findings	<i>Research designed to speak to “skills” and “secondary reform” discourses</i>
Significant contribution	The research contributes: conceptually, practically, morally, methodologically, heuristically	<i>The research seeks to conceptually and practically to understandings of the possibilities for education in human development.</i>
Ethical	The research considers ethics: procedural, situational and culturally specific, relational, exiting	<i>The researcher will follow guidance as directed by UMD IRB; DBE and an adult representative (e.g., school principal) at each study site.</i>
Meaningful coherence	The study: achieves what it sets out to do, uses appropriate methods and procedures and meaningfully interconnects literature, questions, findings and interpretations	<i>Described in this proposal</i>

Adapted from Tracy, 2010

Validity and Credibility. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p. 48) identify validity as the “process whereby the researcher earns the confidence of the reader that he or she has ‘gotten it right.’” Mertens (2010) parallels the concept of credibility in qualitative research with that of internal validity used in quantitative research. She does the same with transferability and external validity. To Tracy’s description of credibility (which

includes thick description, triangulation and multi-vocality), Mertens (2010) adds, prolonged and persistent engagement and progressive subjectivity.

In order to get to know the research site and context, I visited each research site over 15 times. During each visit spent at least two hours on site. During the period of this research I also spent 18 months living in Pretoria, South Africa. During fifteen of these months, I was engaged in related education research activities at the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation at the University of Johannesburg. To provide thick description, I often draw on extended quotes from interview transcripts. This is because interviewees often, in one thought, speak to issues of education, aspiration, and their lived realities. By presenting longer quotes and exchanges, I give the reader an opportunity to assess interviewees' perspectives and a sense of how the researcher engaged with interviewees. All chapters presenting findings include long quotes and strive to provide thick description. I triangulated my raw data as well as my interpretations of the data using several methods. Through my research with CERT, I spoke with other secondary school and FET college students and teachers on similar issues (i.e., the relationship between education work and society) and during the research period, I attended several academic seminars and events covering topics related to my research. After data analysis, I returned to some of the literature I had previously read to compare my findings with those identified in the literature. My progressive subjectivity was checked through regular conversations (formal and informal meetings) with work colleagues where we discussed my research. I twice presented preliminary findings to colleagues from Faculties of Education and Social Sciences at South African universities. After completing a preliminary analysis of the data, I completed a member checking exercise at one of the two research sites.⁵⁷ During interviews, I also sought out heterogeneity and perspectives which may conflict with my normative framework. One NSC learner spoke of the purpose of education largely in terms of survival; a small number of learners suggested that values are to be learned at home, not school.

Dependability. For qualitative research, Mertens (2010) parallels the concept of dependability with reliability. In a post-positivist perspective, reliability means “stability over time” (Mertens, 2010, p. 259). As I am coming from a constructivist perspective, I

⁵⁷ I am involved in an ongoing process to schedule a member-checking exercise with the FET College.

expect social change, but I must at the same time provide evidence of the quality of the research process. Tracy considers theoretical constructs, data collection and analytical methods, time in field and awareness of context as markers of reliability. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) emphasize the importance of documenting the quality of the research process (i.e., researcher training, documentation of the research process and participants, quality of instruments, and multiple means of collecting data) and identifying any major changes. The methods section speaks to data collection and analysis issues. In terms of my own preparation, in addition to completing several courses in qualitative and quantitative research in my doctoral program, I have eight years of experience in conducting qualitative research and evaluation in international education settings.

I interpret the extent to which my validity claims can be justified through a review of the eight criteria offered by Tracy. In addition, I have made efforts to falsify assumptions and concepts embedded in the research design and initial conceptualizations of the data. Guba and Lincoln, 2005 (as cited in Tracy, 2010) offer a useful touchstone for determining the extent to which a piece of qualitative research is sufficiently trustworthy. The researcher should ask,

Are these findings sufficiently authentic...that I [and research participants] may trust myself in acting on their implications? More to the point, would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation on them? (p. 837)

This proposal does not suggest that policy be made with reference to one case study or piece of research. However, I do hope that this research influences policy dialogue, academic discourse, and school and community level discussions on issues related to the research questions.

What must the methods ensure? Given the research questions, methods must support execution of five tasks: (a) elicit in-depth individual and group discussion related to the research questions, (b) deliberately include voice from a range of perspectives, including perspectives from marginalized groups and individuals, (c) situate and make sense of data collected within broader national and international discourses, (d) identify and analyze key concepts and issues and areas of convergence, divergence and heterogeneity in the data collected, (e) provide multi-focal feedback on researcher

interpretation of data. (Edwards, 2011). To meet these needs, I will draw on a variety of data collection and analytic techniques, explained in the next section.

Methods

A research method is a technique for gathering evidence. The data collection methods I used included document review, in-depth interviews and site visits, and were framed by a case study strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Mertens, 2010). Simons (2009, as quoted in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) identifies a case study as,

An in-depth exploration from multiple-perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a “real-life” context. It is research based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understandings of a specific topic...to generate knowledge and /or to inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action. (p. 256)

A case study strategy allows the researcher to draw on a variety of interpretative and critical methods to answer questions within the bounds of a defined “case.” In line with the methodological perspective outlined earlier, case research points to the possibility for the accumulation of context-dependent knowledge through research of a constellation of heterogeneous cases, instances or perspectives. Flyvbjerg (2006) notes,

Common to all experts... is that they operate on the basis of intimate knowledge of several thousand concrete cases in their areas of expertise. Context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity. Such knowledge and expertise also lie at the center of the case study as a research and teaching method or to put it more generally still, as a method of learning. (p. 222)

Case analysis can allow for highly complex and nuanced understanding of the subject of inquiry. The goal is not to develop a predictive theory but to convey the “story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told me” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 238). If Tracy’s (2010) standards for qualitative research are followed, then the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification. I consider this research to be the study of a single case, secondary education in South Africa, in which I follow two different strands: the NSC program implemented

at an academic secondary school and the NCV program taking place at an FET College campus.

Entry, exit, reciprocity

I applied for and received ethical clearance to conduct this research from the university of Maryland Institutional Review Board, the Department for Higher Education and Training (for the FET College), the Gauteng Department of Education (for the Secondary School), and the Administrator of the FET College where I conducted the research. The University of Maryland IRB, DHET and the Gauteng Department of Education each have guidelines for conducting research in schools, with which I complied. Upon receipt of official clearances, I met with official staff at the secondary school (the principal) and the FET College (the Research Chair) to explain the aims of the research and create a schedule for conducting interviews. I also wrote a letter to teachers to communicate the aims and objectives of this research to secondary school teachers at one of the study sites. Site-visits and in-depth interviews were conducted from January –October, 2014. Once the dissertation is completed, a copy will be delivered to DHET and GDE research offices, per their request. The FET College did not request a reciprocity arrangement. At the secondary school, I agreed to teach Biology, but ended up teaching only one lesson. I made several, unsuccessful, efforts to schedule a second lesson.

Interviewees and variation

Research primarily took place at two study sites: a secondary school and an FET College campus, each located in township communities in Gauteng province. The secondary school is located in a township where the population is made of predominantly of lower middle class, working class, and poor black South Africans. The population comprises households where the home language is predominantly Sotho, Zulu, or Xhosa. The region includes many households and individuals who have migrated from the Eastern Cape and Lesotho. While all secondary school students live in the township surrounding the school, many are originally from other provinces in South Africa. The FET College is also located in a township where the population is made-up of predominantly lower middle class, working class, and poor black South Africans. The FET College student population does not necessarily represent the population in the

surrounding township: several FET College students migrated to Gauteng from rural areas in Limpopo, a province north of Gauteng. Sites were selected based three rationales: they were located in township communities, they served predominantly poor and marginalized populations, and the leadership at the school or college expressed a willingness to support the research.

Table 13: Research sites and interviewees

Research Sites	Populations
No-name Secondary School <i>Gauteng Province</i>	Predominantly 16-18 year old youth enrolled in NSC program
No-name FET College, No-name campus <i>Gauteng Province</i>	Predominantly 16-24 year old youth enrolled in NCV program

I interviewed a total of 38 people, outlined in the table below. I interviewed fourteen NSC learners, eight of whom were girls and six of whom were boys. Four of the learners were in Grade 11 and ten were in Grade 12. All learners were taking classes in the sciences learning area (a “track” of four foundational subjects and three specialization subjects) which appeared to be the learning area for students interested in attending university. I did not intentionally select learners from only one learning area. I interviewed four NSC teachers: two males and two females. Teachers taught a variety of subjects (English, Business Studies, Geography, Tourism, and Physical Science) to learners in Grades 10, 11 and 12. I interviewed eleven NCV learners at the FET College learners, seven of whom were girls and four of whom were boys. Learners were at various stages of their NCV experience: levels 2, 3 and 4, and were enrolled in one of two different occupational areas: Engineering or Business Studies. I interviewed three learners who were focusing on foundational studies. I interviewed three FET College lecturers. All NCV and NSC learners, teachers and lecturers interviewed were black South Africans. In addition to interviewing teachers and learners, I had brief meetings with the principal at the secondary school, the Campus Director at the FET College campus where I conducted research, and the Head of Department for Research at the FET

College. I also conducted four external interviews: one with an individual at the Department for Basic Education headquarters, one with a GDE Institutional Development and Support staff member at the district level, one with a prominent practitioner in skills development in South Africa, and one with an unemployed youth who had gone to school and was doing education research in one of the communities in which I was conducting this research.

Table 14: Interviews

Interviewee	Interviews
Secondary School (NSC Learners)	14
FET College (NCV Learners)	11
Teachers (NSC)	4
Lecturers (NCV)	3
Other	6
TOTAL	38

Methods of data collection and data sources

I see data collection as an iterative and recursive processes. This means I consider the collection and review of evidence as a process of discovery which requires regular review of and reflection on my theoretical assumptions and perspectives during the research process. My research relied on three main types of evidence gathering: document review, individual interviews and site visits.

Document review: The document review covers both the literature already reviewed to develop my dissertation proposal as well as literature I continued to uncover and seek out during the research process. Boote and Beile (2005) admonish doctoral students to be “scholars before they are researchers” (p. 11) and argue that a “substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research” (p. 3). The literature review should allow the researcher to summarize and synthesize existing literature to identify problems and dilemmas, identify under-researched areas, and provide opportunities for the

development of a new perspective.⁵⁸ I did not consider the literature review to be a static part of my research. Rather, it evolved based on issues, problems, and ideas which emerged through the process of data collection, analysis, and member-checking. During the research process I continued to seek out, read, and analyze new documents. My approach to finding new documents include targeted searches of relevant academic literature and grey literature, bibliographic treeing (identifying new sources based on citations from identified articles), and extensive conversations with relevant human sources who pointed me in new directions. Questions and perspectives related during the data collection and analysis process led to inquiry on emergent concepts and topics. With reference to the skills discourse, issues of document origin and ideological perspective (e.g., a peer reviewed journal article, a “position” paper); terminology used (e.g., how is “skill” defined?); and document articulation of research validity and trustworthiness were given close attention.

Individual semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews followed an interview protocol articulating a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit voice and potential in vivo codes. The protocol included several probing questions. At the beginning of the interview, I asked for permission to voice-record the interview for later transcription. If voice recording was not agreed to, then I took handwritten notes (Roulston, 2010). Even if interviews are voice-recorded, I took notes during the interview to capture non-verbals, thoughts that occurred to me. I reflected on these things in memorandums written immediately after I completed the interview. I prioritized asking open-ended questions so that interviewees had opportunities to discuss education and livelihood issues important to them. Questions I asked include, “Can you tell me about school: What classes are you taking? Are you involved in other activities?” “What do you think is the purpose of secondary education?” and “Some people say the purpose of education is to get a job, what do you think about this?”

To make the most of each interview and to honor and respect interviewees’ involvement in this research, I followed several strategies for good interviewing articulated by Roulston (2010) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011). Strategies I followed

⁵⁸ Boote and Beile (2005) identify five topical areas against which one can evaluate the quality of a literature review: Coverage, synthesis, methodology, significance, rhetoric

included: (i) clear communication; (ii) establishing rapport and trust; (iii) having a good interview protocol; (iv) demonstrating active listening through verbal and non-verbal cues and limiting interviewer speech; (v) being attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues and markers identifying possibilities for probing, being comfortable with silence; (vi) being attentive to interviewee comfort level; (vii) being non-interruptive; (viii) demonstrating cultural sensitivity, openness and being non-judgmental and aware of power dynamics; (ix) keeping the subject and interview “on track” and (x) interviewing in a comfortable place. Sample interview protocols are included in the appendix. I interviewed FET College Lecturers, NCV learners, and NSC teachers individually. The secondary school principal asked that I interview NSC learners in pairs. As such, I conducted a total of seven interviews with NSC learners. Each of these interviews included two NSC learners. I also interviewed a pair of NSC teachers together. In the joint interviews, I encouraged interviewees to speak freely, and to feel comfortable sharing alternative viewpoints. In these interviews, interviewees appeared to feel comfortable offering an alternative viewpoint, or disagreeing, in a civil manner, with the perspective of the other interviewees.

Site-visits played an important role in the research process. All learner, student, teacher and lecturer interviews were conducted on site. During site visits, I also walked around the school campuses and chatted with informally with staff and learners. These visits played an important role helping me get a sense of place for each research site and supported analysis presented in the findings sections.

My time in South Africa, related research activities.

I lived in Pretoria, South Africa from January 2013 to November 2014. During this period I wrote my comprehensive exam for my PhD program (early 2013), completed my dissertation proposal (defended September 2013), and completed my dissertation research (October 2013-October 2014). During this same period, I was awarded a Fulbright Grant (Dec. 2013-Aug. 2014) and conducted my dissertation research associated with this grant. The host institution and research center, the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) at the University of Johannesburg provided an academic home away from home. Through my work at CERT, I became involved in the Emerging Voices 2 research project. I worked as a voluntary researcher

on the EV2 project from October 2013-October 2014. A brief description of EV2 and its relation to my dissertation research is discussed in the next few paragraphs.

Emerging Voices 2 is a two-year research project designed to build a network of progressive researchers and community advocates tasked with developing a new vision for post-school education which better meets the priorities and interests of individuals in poor and working class communities. Our research questions include: What are the lived experiences of individuals in relation to education and work in poor and working class communities? What is the current reality of post-school education from the perspectives of individuals in poor and working class communities? And, what is a new vision of post-school education that will better serve human and community development in poor and working class communities in South Africa? EV2 is funded by DHET through the National Skills Fund, implemented by the Education Policy Consortium and is taking place at four sites: two in the Eastern Cape and one each in Limpopo and Gauteng provinces.⁵⁹ The Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) at the University of Johannesburg is implementing EV2 in Sedibeng West. EV2 partners include Vaal University of Technology, Sedibeng FET College, Public Adult Learning Centres in Sedibeng West and several informal youth development organizations and formations.⁶⁰ Partners participate in a site-based learning and advocacy team (SLA) and a youth research, learning and advocacy team (YRLA), both of which support to the development, implementation and analysis of EV2 research activities.

In line with a Freirean research approach, EV2 seeks to engage in a sustained and inclusive collaboration with partners in Sedibeng to develop and advocate for a new community-derived vision for post-school education. Such engagement includes skills development among youth researchers in writing, research and advocacy and co-developing community workshop and dialogue activities promoting critical reflection and debate on issues related to youth, community and skills development. Data collection activities in which I participated in EV2 include facilitation of, participation in, or

⁵⁹ Research is being implemented by three university-based research centres (the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation at the University of Johannesburg, the Nelson Mandela Institute at the University of Fort Hare and the Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and training at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) and the Centre for Education and Policy Development.

⁶⁰ Sebokeng Zone 13 Library Reading Club, the Kwa-Masiza Community Literacy and Numeracy Group (CLING), Nal'ibali and the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance

analysis of data from over twenty site-based meetings and workshops, ten individual interviews, four community dialogues and written reflections and articles from five YRLA researchers. Balwanz and Hlatshwayo (2014) share preliminary findings from EV2 research in Sedibeng.

My intensive participation in EV2 research provided me an opportunity to collect additional empirical data at an NCV program at a different FET College campus (not included in this research) and supported my intensive engagement with other South African education researchers, academics, and practitioners. I see my involvement in EV2 research as playing an important role in sensitizing me to the South African education context in poor and working class communities and helping me think through complex issues related to interpretation, analysis, and triangulation of raw data through extensive discussion with researchers, extended involvement with a different set of interviewees, and going through the process of preparing for publication, three peer-reviewed articles related to EV2.

Major changes

There were three major changes to this research. The first is that a secondary school site at the originally proposed location was not available, so I had to go to a secondary school in a different township. The choice of site in a small qualitative study is, of course, important. I chose not to go to the originally community as it was supposedly over researched and schools felt overwhelmed. The secondary school I ended up going to was in a community in which some interviewees said they felt was often forgotten. The school was in an urban township, but still separate from other major metropolitan areas in Gauteng. Near the conclusion of my research at the secondary school, I was chatting with some local youth who asked me why I didn't do my research at another local secondary school, "since everyone knew that [the other] one was better." Such comments produce anxiety, but after a mental exercise in which I drew on community constructed conceptions of a "good school" (i.e., one with a high matric pass rate and good discipline), worked those conceptions through my theoretical framework and analysis and juxtaposed it with the data and analysis from my original site, my anxiety decreased. I think many of my main findings would remain unchanged. On the

whole, what I saw and heard at the research site I choose was echoed in much of the peer reviewed literature on issues in secondary schools in South Africa.

The second major change was that I took out the research question which was related to jobs and transferrable skills. After a few tries at the FET College, I realized that there was not enough time in the interviews, and speaking about hypothetical futures and generic “transferrable” skills would not yield insights which I thought were as valuable as others shared by interviewees (i.e., insights about their lived experiences in the communities and in the classroom and their dreams of the future). For FET College students, more meaningful responses came from their rationale for attending the FET College / NCV program, their interest in a particular program or occupational area, their description of what they wanted to do next, and how that related with their plans for the future. I came to the conclusion that interrogating a set of “transferrable” or “non-cognitive” skills would not yield much in the way of generalizable knowledge (given my small sample size) and would take away time and space for interviewees to speak in their words and on their own terms to their perspectives and experiences. Often, of course, NCV interviewees spoke in terms of transferable and non-cognitive skills. Secondary school (NSC) students, unprompted, also spoke in terms of transferable and non-cognitive skills. This is an issue which could be fruitfully studied in other research projects.

The third major change to this research is that I did not interview people from the business community. I chose instead to focus on teachers and learners so that I would ensure “saturation” in the number of interviews held, as well as collect some divergent perspectives. In my literature review, as well as in the process of critiquing the skills discourse in other publication such as Ngcwangu and Balwanz (2014), I identified several incongruities between DBE and DHET policy and the perspectives of industry. I am not suggesting that perspectives of business are unimportant, nor am I de-emphasizing the perspectives of NCV learners, the majority of whom sought, eventually, employment. Instead, I made a decision to prioritize my empirical research in ascertaining and interrogating the perspectives of teachers and learners. Limitations to this research are discussed in the final section.

Methods of data analysis

I used three inductive strategies for my analysis and interpretation of data – memoing, inductive coding and concept mapping – and followed one main piece of guidance: “stay close to the data” (Charmaz, 2012). During the implementation of this research, I considered data collection and analysis as an iterative and recursive process. What that meant is that during the period that I was conducting interviews, I was also writing memos identifying key themes and quotes and developing a matrix (so as to allow me to compare findings across interviews). As I gathered data, my understandings of main concepts and interviewee experiences evolved, which played a role in later iterations of data collection and analysis. Further, as particular themes and concepts emerged, I was able to investigate some of them more deeply as well as seek out divergent perspectives which could potentially point to heterogeneity or falsification of emergent themes and concepts (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Tracy, 2010).

Of the total number of interviews, nine interviewees, four of them teachers, declined to be audio-taped. For these interviews, I made handwritten notes, which immediately after the interviews, I typed out. The remainder of the interviews I conducted were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed and resulted in over 300 single-spaced pages of raw data. In the process of conducting this research, I authored 47 memos. I took hand-written notes during all interviews. For over half of the interviews I conducted, I completed a short “initial” memo to identify key issues shared by the interviewee and my reflections and thoughts on issues and themes which emerged.

For all interviews I completed a “transcript” memo. In this memo, I identified important themes and issues raised by the interviewee and supported it with a direct quote. Some of these themes and issues were later revisited as codes. In the transcript memo, I also included a matrix where I matched key themes with research questions. Inclusion of this content often resulted in memos of four to eight pages in length. The process for writing each of these memos included two close readings of the transcript and took between two or three hours to write. Once completed, I transferred identified themes and supporting quotes from each memo to a larger matrix organized by my research questions. The matrix allowed me to look at responses and quotes by theme across research interviewees. The memos served an important analytic purpose in that they

allowed me to conceptualize data in narrative form, or, put another way to take “stock of where you are in thinking about your project by writing down your ideas about how your data do or do not fit together” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 123). Memos also served an important role in identifying key quotes which not only related to specific themes, but also spoke to the interconnectedness of themes and highlighted interviewee voices. In my experience, writing these memos played a critical intermediate role in allowing me to discover and explore possible themes (areas of agreement or parsimony). They also help me identify (or encouraged me to seek out) areas of heterogeneity in perspective. Table 15 presents the documents I used to store raw data, engage in data analysis, explore relationships across themes, and consider relationships between theory, discourse and data.

Table 15: Data organization and analysis

Data org. and analysis	Purpose
Voice data, individual transcript files	House raw data
Initial memo	Identify key issues shared by interviewees, develop initial themes/codes, pull out important quotes, organize key themes identified by RQs
Transcript memo	
Data matrix	Compare key themes and quotes across interviewees (NSC and NCV), organized by RQs
Quotes memos	Separate memos (NSC and NCV) where I arranged quotes by themes identified in the memos
Coding transcripts	I inductively coded all interview transcripts
Codes memos	I wrote two separate memos, one for the NCV and one for the NSC, where I organized codes by themes / RQ and identified the number of interviewees speaking to each code
Analysis memos	Two memos (NSC and NCV) where I developed a narrative based on all previous memos and the data matrix
Mapping theory to codes memo	One memo where briefly mapped my research findings (outlined in my analysis memos) to my conceptual framework and theory. This memo played an important role in the revision of my conceptual framework, in thinking through how the raw data responded to RQ4 and in organizing how I presented my findings.
Dissertation Outline	A roman numeral and narrative outline where I organized all the above material (quotes, codes, themes, relationship to theory and conceptual framework) into a narrative bringing together my conceptual framework, my literature review, my findings and my analysis.
Full Transcripts	A document including all interview transcripts. I used this document to check the frequency of codes or code words while writing, review the context of quotes and discussions, and cross-check /validate the extent to which a decent number of interviewees spoke to a particular topic/theme.

Table 16 identifies some of the initial codes I created based on my review of the raw transcript data. The codes included in this table are associated with the responses of at least four interviewees. The table does not include the full list of codes. As can be seen, these initial codes simplify chunks of data into concepts and support comparison of data. In subsequent iterations of analysis I draw on these initial codes to reconceptualize data in ways that would allow me to link data to theory.

After developing initial codes, I wrote two “analysis” memos where I developed a narrative based on all previous memos and the data matrix and one “mapping codes to theory” memo where I mapped my research findings (outlined in my analysis memos) to my conceptual framework and theory. The latter memo played an important role in the revision of my conceptual framework, in thinking through how the raw data responded to RQ4, and in organizing how I presented my findings. In all three memos, I became deeply involved in the process of considering relationships with initial codes, quotes and theory and re-conceptualizing codes in ways which more directly identified the link between the raw data and the theory.

Table 16: Initial codes on the NCV and NSC

NCV Codes	NSC codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of poverty ▪ The practical ▪ Second-chance ▪ Dreams / passions ▪ Going to varsity ▪ Dumping grounds ▪ Resource issues ▪ Grade 9s (maturity) ▪ Lack of exposure ▪ Learning is social ▪ Perseverance ▪ Crime ▪ No to the triple challenge ▪ NCV – no recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Migration ▪ Absent parents ▪ University! ▪ Escape poverty ▪ Career ▪ Banking education* ▪ Theory, no practical ▪ No extra-curricular ▪ Learning areas* ▪ Exam pressure * ▪ Self-knowledge* ▪ Peer pressure / dropout ▪ Safety and security ▪ No resources ▪ Guidance ▪ Exposure

In this process, I maintained the practice of associating interviewee quotes with initial and reconceptualized codes to maintain the “raw data underpinning” of re-conceptualized codes. By doing this, I felt more comfortable in arguing that heuristic claims were “warranted” by the raw data. For example, for NSC interviewee data, I juxtapose the importance NSC learners place on “learning about yourself” with their experience of “banking education”, “exam pressure” and “learning areas.” [See ‘*’ in the table above]. I drew on these codes to think through how learners currently experience the relationship between education, work, and society and re-conceptualized purposes of education as instrumental and existential. In nearly all interviews, learners also speak to their existential interests and aspirations: doing something they love, following their passion, caring for their family, or escaping poverty. When they discuss secondary education, they may identify it as both an instrument to help them realize these futures (e.g., getting a level four qualification and going to university) as well as a process (e.g., learning about marine biology) that supports their personal growth into or toward an imagined future. Among other uses, initial codes played a very important role in expanding my appreciation of the impact of learners’ backgrounds and social contexts on their educational experiences.

During this process I continued to look for patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities. For example, one learner described the purpose of secondary education as survival and another learner emphasized the importance of secondary education in helping her become a good parent (the learner thought too many children were not well taken care of). To me, these instances do not suggest that we “re-imagine” secondary education policy to address these individual concerns, but they do speak to the complex and challenging environment in which learners live, as well as to what types of learning, knowledge, and skill which different learners consider to be relevant.

The “analysis” memos and “mapping theory to codes” memos were used as a framework to draft my dissertation outline (which was comprised of a Roman numeral outline and a ten page narrative). In the outline, I drew on all the above memos and materials (see Table 21) to craft a narrative which brought together my conceptual framework, my literature review, my findings, and my analysis. The authoring of the

dissertation itself, specifically the findings chapters, the analysis chapter, and the introduction chapter included another layer of analysis. To help with the writing I created two separate documents, one which included transcripts from all NCV interviews and one which included transcripts from all NSC interviews. In writing and refining chapter themes and sub-themes and seeking out relevant supporting data, I used this document to check the frequency of code words and phrases, review the context of quotes and discussions, and cross-check /validate the extent to which a reasonable number of interviewees spoke to a particular topic or theme. By cross-checking my “codes” memos with word frequencies in the raw transcripts and associated raw quotes, I sought to strengthen the “dependability” of this research and my presentation of findings. For example, at the FET College, issues of “pending results” and “corruption related to bursary payments” seemed important. While these are important issues, only a small number of FET College learners (three of nine) spoke to these issues. The interviewees spoke with passion about these issues; however, nearly all NCV learners spoke to the importance of “practical” learning and their interest in continuing their education after completing the NCV. With respect to the research questions as well as to the themes to which the preponderance of NCV student spoke to, I spent more time trying to make sense of the “the practical” and understand why NCV learners expressed a preference for continuing their education as opposed to entering the workforce (the “official” purpose of the NCV).

Reflexivity and positionality

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) define reflexivity as “the questioning of one’s place and power relations within the research process” (p. 13). Adding to this, Mann and Kelley (1997, as quoted in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) note that a reflexive researcher is aware that “all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced; it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed” (p. 38-39). As I am embedded in the research process, an instrument, engaging in the collection and interpretation of data, it is critical that I explore and seek to understand the biases, assumptions, and expectations I bring into this research. This requires a reflection on my positionality to the research topic, interviewees, and sites

prior to engaging in research and continuous reflection during the research period (through memoing).

My positionality: As a white, middle class heterosexual male from the United States, a member of a population largely responsible for constructing dominant discursive practices in the United States (e.g., social, political, cultural norms), I have been afforded several social and economic privileges to which I am in many cases blind. I've not had to struggle for the right to vote or political representation; I can enter into and dissolve contractual and credit arrangements more easily than most; I benefit from the privileges accorded my family tree in terms of accumulated wealth, cultural capital, social status, self-worth; I have not been discriminated against based on my gender, ethnicity, mother tongue (English) or sexual orientation in ways that significantly diminish my agency, capability or voice. As a U.S. citizen, I am also a beneficiary of existing global power structures privileging military power and dominant interests of global capitalism and finance shaped by wealthy countries and discourses privileging English, certain types of education and cultural capital. As an investor, I am financially rewarded (for now) by bets I place on expectations of corporate profit. This privilege is made manifest in being expected to write this proposal in my mother tongue; gaining audience and influence by virtue of my cultural capital and social network; having freedom to take risks knowing that tomorrow I will not find myself financially destitute or unable provide health care for myself or loved ones. These privileges, of course, are not universal. Lemert (2002) argues that heterosexual white males are least likely to be aware social structures and discourses which support and perpetuate their privilege. Power inequalities are more likely to be visible to those with less power, who experience the unequal sharing of resources, the unequal valuing of knowledge, the unequal access to democratic participation and venues of justice and the legacy of generations of historical inequalities. Added to this positionality is the fact that this research is being conducted in a post-colonial and post-apartheid context – where dialectics between Western/European, white, wealthy, capitalist and Africa, black, poor, non-capitalist have the potential to prevent mutual understanding and development of rapport. The above narrative highlights differences between people and backgrounds: answering the call for reflexivity also requires that I seek out areas of common cause and understanding.

Answering the call for reflexivity required that I take special care when I engaged with the lives and experiences of teachers and learners. I sought to be cognizant of culture, experience, interests, perspectives, insecurities and fears, among other things, of interviewees and of their perspectives of me and the research I conducted. When uncomfortable situations or misunderstandings arose, I sought to navigate them with sensitivity and in ways which dignified the perspective and confidentiality of interviewees. Reflection, in the form of memoing, was used to help me understanding the ways and extent to which my positionality hindered, or potentially supported my understanding of interviewee perspectives. I sought to be candid and honest with interviewees about the nature of the research. During interviews, I sought to engage interviewees in my interpretation of data and often asked them to check my interpretation of their perspective. To ensure that I gave voice to interviewee responses, I sought to be open to alternative world views and values. This means that in this research I may at times emphasize perspectives which I may personally feel are already well-voiced in prior research (e.g., the persistence of poverty and dominant discursive practices in perpetuating oppressive social structures). In my relationship with CERT, and in my research on the Emerging Voices project, I developed close relationships with a diverse group of South African researchers who, at various times, served as sounding boards for the various issues, challenges or interpretative quandaries I encountered.

Ethical considerations

As noted earlier, I applied for and received ethical clearance to conduct this research from the university of Maryland Institutional Review Board, the Department for Higher Education and Training (for the FET College), the Gauteng Department of Education (for the Secondary School) and the Administrator of the FET College where I conducted the research. The University of Maryland IRB, DHET and the Gauteng Department of Education each have guidelines for conducting research in schools, with which I complied. Upon receipt of official clearances, I met with official staff at the secondary school (the principal) and the FET College (the Research Chair) to explain the aims of the research and discuss a schedule for conducting interviews.

There are three main ethical considerations which come up with respect to this research: informed consent, confidentiality, and interviewing minors (specifically, youth

between the ages of 16-18 in interviews). Informed consent was done verbally and in writing with all interviewees so as to explain the purpose and benefit of the research and explain the nature of participation. For minors, written consent from parents was secured. To maintain interviewee confidentiality, I do not identify interviewee names. The names of interviewees are only available to me and my supervisor (the PI on the IRB application). Electronic documents and voice recorded data are kept on a password protected computer.

Given the sensitivity of some of the data collected, maintaining the confidentiality of the secondary school and the FET College where I conducted this research is of importance. DHET is aware of the FET College campus where I conducted this research. The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) authorized me to conduct research at one of four secondary schools. I do not intend to identify the secondary school at which I ended up conducting the research. That said many members of the community, perhaps more than one hundred students, teachers, and community members at large are aware of the name of secondary school at which I conducted this research. That said, in this publication, I have sought to maintain the confidentiality of the institutions at which I have conducted this research. Other ethical considerations are outlined in the UMD IRB application.

Limitations

I identified two major limitations to this research. The first limitation is that the research was conducted in English. While English is the language of learning and teaching at the secondary school and the FET College, English is not the home language of any of the NSC learners or NCV students interviewed. My inclusion of extended quotes and exchanges shows the level of English of different interviewees. This limitation affected the research in several ways. First, interviewees may not have been able to express themselves as fully as they would have liked and second, teachers appear to have identified some interviewees based on their level of English language ability. This means I was likely interviewing the more academically strong learners at these institutions – learners more likely to get an NSC, or complete the NCV course. As such, this research may offer a greater emphasis on how students who get greater encouragement and / or are more motivated, construct the purpose of education.

Importantly, my interviews with teachers and other adult policymakers provided an alternative point of view, as they spoke to the issues facing less academically strong learners – including those not likely to attend university and those at risk of dropping out of the FET College. Of course, these perspectives cannot replace the missing voices of students with lower levels of English.

A second limitation is that I was not able to engage school management at either school as intensively as I would have liked. The secondary school principal and the FET College campus manager were both quite busy during the research period and delegated to another individual the responsibility for liaising with me on this research. While counterparts played an important role in helping me schedule interviewees, neither were particularly interested in becoming engaged in the intellectual substance of the research. This limitation detracted somewhat from the extent to which I could facilitate member-checks and peer de-briefings. However, this limitation also offers an upside: by going into schools which were not frequent targets of researchers and in which school leadership was not integrally involved in the research process, I felt that I was able to access the genuine perspectives of interviewees, which for the most part, appeared uninfluenced by messages or perspectives from school leadership. Put another way: interviewees often felt more comfortable being critical about their situation. While some asked me not to record interviews, or for some periods of the interview, asked that I stopped recording, many appeared to feel free to offer their critical perspective about their experiences.

Chapter 8: Diversity and inequality in Gauteng Province

This chapter provides some narrative and quantitative background on issues of diversity and inequality in Gauteng province, including information on the background of learners and students interviewed.

Suburbs and townships

I love living in Gauteng. Everything is here. Parts of Jo'berg remind me of Chicago where I went to university – trains and buses filled with people going to and from work, enclaves of privilege, peeking over fences, mad streets, towering concrete structures, fashion, a slight edge. Expressways, traffic, traffic reports; live music, an annual Portuguese festival, Muslim comedians. I went out driving yesterday to Centurion, in between Pretoria and Johannesburg. I am reminded of the sprawl west of Chicago – endless strip malls, light pollution, new communities, Indian, white and black South Africans patronizing stores in a mall I may only go to once. I enjoy the Highveld east of Pretoria: its arid, near desolate spaces remind me of northwest Kansas. There is an abandoned diamond mine; next door is a brewpub. Not too far away is a place where you can go rock climbing. I go jogging in the country some weekends. The trail runs by working farms and a yard with abandoned military and police vehicles. It ends at a restaurant known for its tea parties. Other weekends, I can go to the Irene market, located near the site of a concentration camp where Boer men, women and children were held during the second Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902). Twelve hundred people died in that camp.

If you can afford the suburbs, you can live a comfortable life in Pretoria: cappuccinos are ubiquitous, good food is inexpensive, nearly every weekend there is a rugby, soccer, or cricket match to be taken in. Many of the neighborhoods in Pretoria are suburban. Wide streets are lined with mature trees, houses are surrounded by some variety of fence or gate, patrol cars hum along the streets in the afternoons and evenings checking in with the security guards who work at many of these houses. My wife and I eat breakfast and dinner outside for nearly half of the year. The weather is so nice. We braai, that is, we cook meat over hardwood coals. There's a butcher we go to who knows what we like. We go to separate bakeries to get, respectively the best baguette and best

croissants in Pretoria. The dollar is strong against the rand and labor is cheap in South Africa. There is talk of raising the minimum wage.

Gauteng is South Africa's smallest province in terms of area, but has the largest population. Gauteng is the business and economic hub of South Africa, the hub of government, and of media. People flock to Gauteng. Only 56% of the people living in Gauteng were born in Gauteng (Stats SA, 2011). Over one million Gauteng residents are immigrants: many from Zimbabwe, given recent turmoil there, and many from other countries in southern Africa. There are Somalians, Nigerians and other immigrants here. Over one million Gauteng residents come from Limpopo, a rural province north of Gauteng. They come here in search of economic opportunity but often have difficulty finding accommodation.

After a heavy rain, the shacks in which many migrant and immigrant families live, being located in a low lying plain, were flooded. I drove by one day and saw wet blankets and mattresses outside houses angled toward a tepid sun. Our gardener's family lives some distance from Pretoria, he has a temporary residence in a near-by township. A gas explosion from a shop next door blew down two walls of his temporary house. A month later, he went back to Limpopo for the wedding of a relative. We talked on his return. "They broke me" he said. Of course, he has a job, he lives in Gauteng: his relatives expected him to spend lavishly at the wedding. At another township, where I am doing interviews, a Somali shopkeeper has been killed. A youth researcher I am working with shows me the intersection where the incident happened. Not everyone is an immigrant: many families have lived in Gauteng townships for several generations. Some of the learners I chatted with spoke with concern about the prevalence of attacks on immigrants. One learner questioned his culture: "Is someone who is Zulu too proud to do the things that immigrants are doing?" A small business owner told me that he found Mozambicans willing to serve as apprentices in his motorbike repair shop. Why not South Africans? Is the wage too small, exploitative? An academic I spoke with said there is concern at a local university that too many of the faculty are foreigners.

Apartheid policy was spatial as well as racial. Neighborhoods are cut off from one and other: Pretoria has several geographically separated communities with no easy path for entry or exit. I spend a lot of my time on the road, driving to townships located

outside of Pretoria and Johannesburg. More than a million workers make the same commute in the opposite direction: taking buses, trains, mini-buses or, often as not, sitting, freezing in the back of a pickup truck on the N1 expressway. They travel from townships to day jobs somewhere in Gauteng, place of gold.⁶¹

Statistics South Africa offers the following definition of township:

Historically, ‘township’ in South Africa referred to an urban residential area created for black migrant labour, usually beyond the town or city limits. Reference is sometimes made to ‘black township’, ‘coloured township’ and ‘Indian township’, meaning that these settlements were created for these population groups. By contrast, the white population resided in suburbs. Informal synonyms for township are ‘location’, ‘lokasie’, ‘ilogishi’. Generally, every town/city has one or several townships associated with it. (Stats SA, 2001)

There are over 40 townships in Gauteng. To protect the confidentiality of the schools in which I am conducting research, I do not share the names of the townships in which I am working. However it is useful to share a few short biographies to locate townships in South Africa’s history and present. While segregationist policies are a part of the fabric of South Africa’s history, the establishment of townships is largely associated with the intersection of the segregationist policies combined with the desire for cheap labor starting from the late 1800s. Under the National Party, forcible relocation of black South Africans to separate areas became a more aggressively pursued social policy. A series of Group Areas Acts provided the legal framework for supporting the forced relocation of millions of black South Africans into black designated areas (townships and rural Bantustans) from the 1950s up until the early 1980s. I’ve included some short biographies of selected townships in Gauteng.

Soshanguve is a township located 25 km north of Pretoria. Soshanguve’s name comes from the languages spoken in the township Sotho, Shangaan, Nguni and Venda. Soshanguve was established in 1974 on land scheduled to be incorporated into what would become the Bophuthatswana Bantustan (or homeland) in 1977. Today, over 400,000 people live in Soshanguve. Soshanguve is home to the Tshwane University of Technology and two FET college Campuses.

⁶¹ Gauteng literally translated means “place of gold.”

Sebokeng is located in the Vaal Triangle 40 km south of Johannesburg. Sebokeng was established in 1965 in part to provide workers for the steel industry in southern Gauteng. The establishment of Sebokeng involved the forced removal and relocation of nearly 19,000 households. Today over 200,000 people live in Sebokeng. Another 100,000 live in Evaton, a township directly north of Sebokeng. Two decades of de-industrialization in the Vaal triangle have left a large number of poor and working class residents jobless. Sebokeng has an FET college campus as well as a satellite campus for the Vaal university of Technology.

Sharpeville, founded in 1935, is one of the oldest townships in the Vaal Triangle. One explanation of the history of Sharpeville has that it was established to move black South Africans “further” away from white residents of Vereeniging. The Sharpeville massacre, in 1960, started as a protest in which black South African’s burned pass books which restricted them from going into certain areas. The protest turned violent and 69 black South Africans were killed by police. In a nod to the sacrifice of those who resisted the Apartheid government, Nelson Mandela signed the South African Constitution in Sharpeville in 1996.

Mamelodi was designated a blacks-only area under the Group Areas act and in the 1960s several thousands of black South Africans were forcibly relocated to Mamelodi. Mamelodi is 10 km from Pretoria and adjacent to the predominantly white suburb of Silverton. Today over 300,000 residents, including a large number of immigrants live in Mamelodi. Townships, being the main areas of residence of black South Africans were often the seat of Apartheid-era resistance. Umkhonto we Sizwe (spear of the nation) safe houses, planning cells and operations took place in townships, including Mamelodi. However, at a certain point it was decided that violent operations start to take place in suburbs, like Silverton, to wake the whites up. (Harris, 2008)

In 2014, of the 13 million people living in Gauteng, nearly five million were living in townships. Poor and working class communities in Gauteng province exist in a state of complexity, change and tension. Communities include individuals and households from a variety of language and ethnic groups; who subscribe to varied religious and traditional beliefs; who have migrated from near and far (and who bring with them different experiences, cultures and customs); and who every day face challenges related to poverty, unemployment or under-employment, poor health, inadequate delivery of basic services (e.g., water, electricity, sewage-disposal), violence and criminality and substance abuse. Interviewees in this research recognize the negative influences of the surrounding community which affect education. While they don't figure in the dominant discourse, secondary school principals, teachers and learners navigate these complexities and tensions on a daily basis. The next section provides some background data on diversity and inequality in Gauteng province.

Comparative data

This section offers comparative data of four geographic areas: Gauteng province (GP), the City of Tshwane (also called Pretoria), the Emfuleni Local Municipality and the Midvaal local municipality. Data are from the Statistics South Africa 2011 census. The purpose of this comparative presentation is to show the diversity and inequality in the province. The City of Tshwane is a government town with a large number of government jobs. The majority of Emfuleni residents live in townships in the industrial region of southern Gauteng. Midvaal is a farming community southwest of Johannesburg.

Population and demography

Emfuleni has a large population density. If we drill down into the township of Sebokeng, located in Emfuleni, we see a population density of over 4,700 residents per square kilometer. The whiter towns of Veerneging and Vanderbijlpark are also located in the Emfuleni Local Municipality (ELM) and have much lower population densities. The comparative data on race show differences by municipality. However, even these data do not communicate the extent to which many communities in Gauteng are separate in terms of racial composition. As noted above, while townships constructed under Apartheid included "black," "coloured," and "Indian," the vast majority of South Africans living in

townships are black South Africans. In Soshanguve, Mamelodi, Sebokeng and Sharpeville 99% of the residents are black South Africans.

Table 17: Comparative data on population

	GP	City of Tshwane	ELM	Midvaal
Population	12,2000,000	2,921,488	721,663	95,301
Population density (sq.km.)		464	747	55

Source: Statistics South Africa 2011 Census

Table 18: Comparative data on “race” composition of population

	GP	City of Tshwane	ELM	Midvaal
Black	78%	75%	85%	58%
Coloured	4%	2%	1%	2%
Indian / Asian	3%	2%	1%	1%
White	15%	20%	12%	39%
Other	1%	1%	1%	0%

Source: Statistics South Africa 2011 Census

South Africa has eleven official languages. In secondary school, learners take a home language as well as a first additional language. In the school where I conducted research, the home language was Sesotho and most learners took English as a first additional language. As indicated in the below table, Gauteng province has a linguistically diverse population. Further, individuals’ first language varies greatly by location. Sotho, Zulu and Afrikaans are the top three first languages in Emfuleni, whereas in the City of Tshwane, the top three first languages are Sepedi, Afrikaans, and Setswana. English is the lingua franca of government.

Table 19: Comparative data on “first language” spoken

	GP	City of Tshwane	ELM	Midvaal
Afrikaans	12%	18%	12%	30%
English	13%	8%	4%	14%
IsiNdebele	3%	6%	1%	0%
IsiXhosa	7%	2%	8%	5%
IsiZulu	20%	8%	13%	12%
Sepedi	11%	19%	2%	0%
Sesotho	12%	5%	52%	27%
Setswana	9%	15%	3%	
Xitsonga	7%	8%	1%	

Source: Statistics South Africa 2011 Census

Poverty and employment

The average annual household income in Gauteng province is R156,000. The figure is slightly higher in Tshwane, but drops to R87,000 in Emfuleni. In all locations, more than 50% of the population has a household income below R38,200. In Emfuleni, 18% of households have no income and an additional 44% of households have an income of less than R38,200 annually. In comparison, over a quarter of households in Tshwane have an income of over R153,000. Nineteen percent of children in Gauteng live in informal housing. According to Child Gauge (2013) “‘informal’ housing consists of: informal dwellings or shacks in backyards or informal settlements; dwellings or houses/flats/rooms in backyards; caravans or tents” (p. 109). Child Gauge shows that 34% of children live in households where there is income poverty and that over 1.5m children in Gauteng receive a child support grant – a grant made to poor (Child Gauge, 2013).

Table 20: Comparative data on household income

	GP	City of Tshwane	ELM	Midvaal
Average income	156,000	182,000	87,000	148,000
No income		15%	18%	15%
R1-R19,600		18%	27%	23%
R19601-38,200		16%	17%	16%
R38,201 - R76,400		13%	13%	12%
R76,401 - R153,800		12%	11%	10%
Above R153,801		26%	13%	24%

Source: Statistics South Africa 2011 Census

Emfuleni has the highest rates of unemployment and youth unemployment at 35% and 45%, respectively. These rates are 10% higher than the averages in Gauteng. Unemployment by race shows black South Africans having an unemployment rate of 40% compared to 28% (coloured South Africans), 18% Indians, and 8%; white (Stats SA, 2014). Thirty (30) percent of Gauteng youth (aged 15-24); about 700,000 are not in education employment or training. Of this number, 80% dropped out in secondary school, or reached grade 12m but did not obtain a qualification (DHET, 2013).

Table 21: Comparative data on unemployment

	GP	City of Tshwane	ELM	Midvaal
Unemployment	26%	24%	35%	19%
Youth Unemployment		33%	45%	25%

Source: Statistics South Africa 2011 Census

Households

Thirty-four percent of households in Gauteng are female-headed households (Stats SA, 2011). According to Child Gauge (2013), in Gauteng, less than 50% of children live in a household with both of their biological parents. Thirty-five (35) percent of children live with their biological mother. HIV/AIDS continues to significantly impact the social fabric of South Africa. Nearly 20% of adults aged 15-49 have AIDS (UNAIDS, 2014) and the HIV prevalence in pregnant women attending public antenatal clinics in 2011 was 29%. In 2011, there were 3.85 million orphans in South Africa, equal to 21% of all children in South Africa. In 2011, 17% of children in South Africa did not have a living father. Child Gauge (2013) notes, “Over half of all orphans are resident in the poorest 20% of households. Around a quarter of children in the poorest 20% of households are orphans” (p. 88).

Table 22: The proportion of children living with their biological parents (Gauteng province)

Household	Proportion
Both parents	48%
Father only	4%
Mother only	35%
No parents	13%

Source: Child Gauge 2013

Learners' backgrounds

Households and poverty

The data presented in the previous chapter evidences the high level of diversity and the pervasive social and economic inequality in Gauteng Province. Schools, communities and households remain greatly influenced by the racial, spatial, and economic and opportunity-access disparities of the racial capitalist system constructed under apartheid. Forced relocation of black South Africans into urban township communities separated nuclear families from extended family structures and ancestral homelands. Implementation of separate education systems created several classes of schools, including poorly resourced rural secondary schools in former Bantustans and low status secondary schools in urban township communities. These issues, in addition

to high levels of job-insecurity and migrant labor, the status of Gauteng as the economic hub of South Africa and the household preference for sending youth to secondary schools and FET colleges in Gauteng (as opposed to sending them to schools in other provinces) have created an environment where many learners are separated from their parents.

I interviewed 14 NSC learners at the secondary school, half of whom were living in a household where one or both parents were absent. Some learners lived with their grandmothers, in some cases because their parents worked elsewhere and in other cases because the parents were dead. Six secondary school learners migrated to the township in Gauteng from other provinces, or had a history of migration from places like Lesotho or the Free State. Inconsistent, or the absence of parental support is a background characteristic of the majority of NSC learners interviewed. Many teachers also expressed lack of parental support as a critical challenge facing learners' success in secondary school. Discussing the impact of parental absence or lack of parental support, one learner says, "some children come from homes [where they get no support]. He might say, 'I know that I'm alive, but no one cares'" (SS Learner 3). According to the DBE school quintile ranking, the secondary school where I conducted my research is a quintile 4 school, one step below the "wealthy" quintile 5 schools. However, the surrounding community has high levels of poverty and unemployment. According to one teacher, "Socially most of the kids here, they can't afford. You look in class [and] the uniform is torn up and the shoes are old, you know, they don't afford, they don't afford. If you look at most of these schools they do actually give them food. During break time they give them food because they cannot afford" (SS Teacher 2).

One exchange with two NSC learners speaks to some of the households from which secondary school students come.

Interviewee 13: I had to live in Lesotho because they had some cultural tradition for my father in Lesotho so I had to stay with my father in Lesotho. I came back here ...when I was young. Then I had to go back to Lesotho again. ...I'm not staying with my parents right now because of work. My father works. He is not permanent at work so he has to go to different places. They have different branches at work so he is an area manager at work so he has to travel. My mother is a designer; she lives in [name of town]. So I often meet them in the Free State when they are off from work. So I had to come and live at my grandmother's place.

Interviewee 14: I'm not staying with my parents. I'm staying with my sister's mum. And my father passed away, and my mum, I don't stay with my mum. (SS Learners 13 and 14)

Several teachers and adult interviewees indicated that in a large number of families, "the grandparents of these children actually take care of the children while the parents go out and work." A few adult interviewees speak of child-headed households (though according to Child Gauge, child-headed households are few in number). A secondary school teacher speaks to this issue.

Most of our learners are living with their grandparents, they are not living with their direct parents, their biological parents.....others they don't have parents, you see because of HIV/AIDS, you see. Others are living with single parents and that also have an impact. ...And then lastly is the fact that they are on their own. Other learners are on their own, they are without parents, you see...They only survive on donations from the churches, from the community, you see. Orphans, they are complete orphans and as a result they don't perform very well in their school activities. (SS Teacher 1)

I interviewed nine NCV learners at the FET College. The majority of the learners I interviewed had dropped out of secondary school (7 of 9) and came from poor or resource constrained backgrounds (6 of 9). Several learners expressed that they received limited or no support from their parents. One learner talks about the financial support he receives from his grandmother. He notes, "just imagine, my grandma, neh? Every month she is earning ...1,200 rands and something. She must send me 400 rands. I must pay for a shack that I'm living in. She must give me rand 300 for food for the whole month. I waste it, I'm gonna suffer the consequences" (FETC Student 3). Another student indicated that a majority of FET College students rely on the bursary to finance their education (FETC Student 8). One FET College learner notes, "My mom died and my dad is not responsible. I live with my grandmother here [close to the FET College]. I went to grade 11, and then I stopped at Grade 12. My dad stopped giving me money for grade 12...so I left. I stayed at home for a year. Then I found out about this [the NCV and the bursary] and I came here. I live with my grandmother and my boyfriend gives me money for transport" (FETC Student 6).

Migration

The issue of migration intersects with issues of historical context (e.g., the creation of townships under Apartheid, the forced re-location of Black South Africans), the economy and parental involvement (e.g., high rates of migrant and casual labor) and learners' opportunities at school (linked to parental support and involvement, poverty, language barriers). One adult interviewee outlines this issue.

I find that in [academic secondary] schools that I have there is two types of migration that I have. One is from parents. Families that come from Lesotho. Closer to the Free State because of the opportunities that they have in Gauteng, with the belief that in Gauteng your child stands a better chance at schooling. They do bring in their children. The dynamics that comes with it is not just language...those children are then ...left with family members to take care of these children while their biological parents go back to Lesotho. So that in itself leaves problems for educators and principals because once you need to consult with the parents so there is problems because it's difficult to get hold of those parents.

The other migration that I find...currently and in the past. It's [name of place] an industrial hub, steel giants are centered here. We find that people from the Eastern Cape, especially Xhosa speaking people, they bring their children and those children are left in backyards with people that they know or neighbors and their parents go back to the Eastern Cape so those children are like child headed families taking care of themselves. So when it's like holiday now the parents will come and pay money so that the children can go home to the Eastern Cape ...it's the same dynamics where we find that if you want to get the parents involved it's very difficult. (Policy 2)

Several NCV learners had migrated to the FET College from a rural area, many from Limpopo Province. A teacher speaks to issues of migration and poor academic preparation, saying, "Most [students] come from Limpopo. Had schools that were not well-resourced" (FETC Lecturer 2). One learner speaks to the promise of the second-chance, noting, "As a student I'm from the rural area, I come here; my mission is to study especially to study on something that I don't know, [that]won't cost too much. Something that my parents will afford" (FETC Student 3).

Education

Secondary school and FET College learners interviewed identified the following educational challenges: poor foundational education (grades 1-9), poor English language preparation and difficulty with math (mostly FET College students). For many learners,

English, the language of schooling, is not their home language. Many learners enrolled in the NCV course at the FET College have a history of academic failure and dropout. Some learners speak to their experience in secondary school as diminishing their self-confidence while others speak to their many failures and subsequent success as demonstrating their perseverance. The educational issues, issues, among others (e.g., the prevalence of teacher-centered, banking education) are discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 9: Layers of purpose, varied learning experiences

The chapter shares teacher, learner, and other adult participants' perspectives on the purpose of secondary education and provides their insights on their learning experiences in the secondary school and the FET College. The chapter begins with a brief description of the “official” purpose of the NSC and the NCV and is followed by presentation and analysis of data.

Secondary education: layers of purpose

“Official” Purposes. The stated purpose of the National Certificate Vocational is to prepare learners to either enter the workplace directly or to undertake further learning to acquire a specialized occupational qualification. The DHET White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) states that the main purpose of FET colleges is “to train young school leavers, providing them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for employment in the labour market” (p. 11). High demand for post-school education, high levels of secondary dropout, and high rates of youth unemployment are all factors which have influenced DHET efforts to increase enrollment in FET colleges and specifically, the NCV program. As noted earlier, the NCV still has an “access first” focus as subject pass rates and throughput rates are very low (Taylor, 2011, p.43).⁶²

The purpose of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) program is largely seen as preparing learners for university study. South Africa has both academic and technical secondary schools. The former prepare learners to take the NSC in academic subjects while the latter prepare learners for examinations in technical subjects.⁶³ The majority of secondary school learners attend academic secondary schools and enroll in business studies or sciences streams. These streams include subjects thought to be helpful in securing admission to university. In DBE policy documents, the purpose of secondary school and the purpose of the NSC leaving exam are often conflated. Of the NSC, Wedekind (2013) notes that while different stakeholders attribute different purposes to the NSC, historically and up to the present, “the school leaving certificate had become

⁶² Since the introduction of the NC (V) in 2007, the colleges have exhibited a very low pass rate, estimated at no more than 20% in the first year. Current throughput rates for trade tests are around 35% (Taylor, 2011, p.43)

⁶³ The NSC curriculum in technical subjects is geared toward pre-employment preparation, but it is unclear what is happening.

strongly associated with one function, namely providing access into university level programmes” (p. 7).

In my review of DBE and DHET publications, education reform and quality improvement priorities were framed by national development goals. National development goals, in turn, were grounded in neoliberal discourse privileging economic growth and private sector development. What this means is that schools and educators were tasked with producing learners, human capital, to respond to national development goals. National policy and goals reinforced learners’ and educators’ conceptions of the purpose of education. Education is still seen as the path to a “bright future.” Learners describe the path as follows: pass the NSC, enter university, obtain a degree and get a job in the formal sector.

Framing the “purpose” discussion

In my interview protocol, I indicate that I will ask my interviewees to respond to the question, “What do you think is the purpose of secondary education?” This is the fourth or fifth question in my interview protocol. Since this question speaks to what I consider my most important research question, I was very concerned about how I framed and approached the question, how interviewees interpreted it, and how we elaborated on the question in dialogue. In all cases, I foreshadowed the question when reading through the informed consent form with interviewees. I often started interviews with general questions: tell me about yourself, your background, your educational background. After about fifteen or twenty minutes, during which we had, hopefully, established a pattern of conversation, I would ask the “purpose” question. Given my constructivist positionality, I would usually couch the question in a way that identifies education as a human construction. I would often position myself as a philosopher asking a timeless philosophical question. This was a deliberate effort on my part to get interviewees to think beyond their immediate concerns and issues with school. For the more mature NCV learners, I could be somewhat brief and associate the question with the establishment of the NCV program in 2007. For example,

Interviewer: Some of the questions I ask are going to sound a little bit like philosophy but the reason I’m asking them,The Department of Education is always changing things, trying to improve things, and then what’s true with the Department of Higher Education [when] they created the National Certificate

Vocational ...I'm just curious from your experience as someone who is enrolled in the program, what do you think is the purpose of the NCV? What is the reason that you are in this program? What do you think its purpose is? (quotation taken from transcript of FETC Student 8)

For NSC learners, all of whom were younger than NCV learners, I often looked further back into history. For example,

Interviewer: ...You know, back in the days whether my ancestors or your ancestors, they were raising their children they didn't send them to school, they maybe just taught them at home. So for me one of the questions that's interesting to me is that we say, we go to secondary school [here in] 2014. Two-hundred years ago there was no school, maybe more like 500 years ago we didn't have secondary school and when people maybe like Angie Motshekga our Minister say, we need to reform secondary school, we need to change it, we need to strengthen it. People like me who are philosophers say, but we should also ask, what is the purpose? So maybe, instead of trying to answer the question myself, I will give you the question and say...To you, what do you think is the main purpose of secondary education? What do you think is the reason that you should be here in secondary school?

In responding to this question, nearly all interviewees spoke to two layers of purpose. I identify these layers as *instrumental* and *existential*. When interviewees speak to the instrumental layer, they identify education as a means to an end: they need to get a qualification to go to university or to be more competitive for a job. Learners identify existential rationales for valuing education as well: they identify in or through education something that is valuable to their existence. Interviewees who value independence, caring for others, knowledge in specific subjects or of their surroundings, self-knowledge or being a good parent may see in education space to develop these capabilities. Career interests may combine the instrumental and the existential: a student who loves working with his or her hands, or who loves animals, may also identify carpentry or marine biology as a viable livelihood. Interviewee responses on the purposes of education are presented in the next three sections.

Instrumental purposes

Most NSC and NCV learners recognize that they need a level 4 qualification to be able to access further education, and later on, a job. The instrumental perspective of education expressed by learners aligns with the dominant discourse on education and what I call the two paths model: that the purpose of secondary education is to prepare

youth for further education and the world of work. Nearly all NSC and NCV learners spoke to specific subjects, fields and occupational areas they were studying and how these areas related to future career interests. Table 23 summarizes NSC and NCV learners' reflections on the purpose of secondary education.

Table 23: Learners on the purpose of secondary school

NCV learners on "purpose"	NSC learners on "purpose"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCV is a stepping stone to further education (9/9) • NCV offers practical experience, as opposed to theory-only training, in an occupational area (7/9) • NCV offers a second chance (6/9) • I don't want to stay at home, I just want to just do something (4/9) • I want to do something I love (3/9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSC is necessary for access to university, NSC is a stepping stone (14/14) • NSC helps you start a career path (8/14) • NSC a path to a bright future, a job, independence, material well-being, (7/14)

NSC learners on instrumental purposes. Nearly all NSC learners interviewed stated that they sought to attend university following graduation from secondary school.⁶⁴ All NSC learners interviewed expressed their interest in going to university, and indicated that to go to university, they must pass the NSC. Several learners expressed the sense that "if you don't have matric your life is doomed" (SS Learner 10). One student said, "we say like this is make it or break it. If your marks are not meeting the requirements of the university you feel like you are doomed in a way. There is a common belief that if you do not go to university and study usually you are going to end up being unsuccessful so we are scared of breaking our future" (SS Learner 8).⁶⁵ All learners interviewed aspire to go to university and recognize passing the NSC as a major milestone.

At this secondary school, as in most secondary schools, learners choose a learning area (also called subject stream) in Grade 10 and then proceed to take the same seven courses in Grades 10 through 12. The learners I interviewed were in the sciences stream.

⁶⁴ A few NSC learners identified the importance government funding, noting that without financial support, they would be unable to pay for University.

⁶⁵ Another learner said that teacher's threaten them, saying that "if you don't pass matric..." life will be tough (SS Learner 1)

In addition to taking four foundations courses (Sotho, English, Mathematics and Life Orientation) they also took Physical Science, Biological Sciences and Economics. More than half of the respondents talked about purpose from a 'career path' perspective: they articulated the inter-relationship between choosing a learning area, studying at university and, later on, getting a job. Several learners expressed that their interest in enrolling in the sciences stream was because they thought that more and better jobs available in the sciences. Here is what a few learners said on this theme.

When you are in Grade 10 that's when you have to choose some subjects and these subjects are going to determine your future. In secondary school this is where we are taught so many things like careers, where do you want to go? (SS Learner 14)

Science has many opportunities. There are many jobs that you can get and those are jobs that can give you a bright future. (SS Learner 5)

As a person that comes from the township I realize that employment is very scarce in our region and there are many social challenges such as drugs, teenage pregnancy, human trafficking so maths and science...maths and science I realize will open more opportunities for me. As a person who loves veterinary science and marine biology... (SS Learner 11)

Learners see choosing a learning area as determining their future and the sciences as offering better job prospects. Many learners expressed an intrinsic interest in a particular subject matter; other learners indicated other reasons for choosing a particular career, like choosing nursing because they wanted to care for others. Over half of the NSC learners indicated that their interest in going to university and getting a job was to escape poverty or improve their material well-being. Other learners identified getting a job as a means of becoming independent (6/14 learners), a way to care for their parents (who had cared for them), or a way to give back to their community. Learners said,

School is where you are groomed. ...for being successful in life...To be successful in living a good life. A good life like not being poor or being needing something. Because if you attend school you are making your future to be better. You can get a better job after school. (SS Learner 13)

A good future is being independent, not depending on somebody else but like you know that you have what is yours. You have a house, you have money, and you have a better job. (SS Student 5)

School will help us become independent. If we attend school and pass our matric we will be able to go to university. Maybe we will find a job next year and we will be able to support our families, support ourselves rather than depend on others because you will end up doing some things that are not appropriate. (SS Learner 9)

Interviewee 14: After matric I would like to go to university and study nursing. I really like to work with people.

Interviewer: ... even people who are sick?

Interviewee 14: I really like to take care of people and I think I can. (SS Learner 14)

The above responses start to move from instrumental to existential purposes and values: independence, caring for families, or having a job that matches your interests.

Several learners expressed dismay with “the path”. Four learners said they were fed up with or hated school and the associated exams. One learner notes, “to be honest I don’t like school, school is just school. I just come here because I want a bright future” (SS Learner 9). Another learner notes,

As a learner I don’t like school, to be honest. But there are advantages and disadvantages of attending school. If I look at the disadvantages I can see that in life I’m going to suffer if I don’t attend school. ...I don’t like school but I just have to attend because I want to live a better life someday. (SS Learner 14)

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NCV learners on instrumental purposes. Seven of nine NCV learners I interviewed dropped out of secondary school before completing their matric. NCV learners recognize the NCV as an opportunity for a second chance. In fact, NCV learners and lecturers consider the FET College and the NCV program as their only option or “last chance” to get a level 4 qualification. NCV interviewee responses on “purpose” align somewhat with the rationale offered in DHET policy, that the NCV helps “less academically” strong learners get a qualification so that they can transition to further education and work. NCV learners speak to these issues below.

[the purpose of the NCV] is to give people opportunities. We need to give people opportunities. It helps people get to the NATED [a tertiary level educational program]. ...If you are sitting at home with a grade 9 or grade 10, what are you going to do? Where are you going to get a job? (FETC Student 6)

For me with this curriculum I'm going to have my matric. [earlier the learner states]...the thing that brought me here, my mum was like 'seeing that you have failed your matric, how about you (inaudible) those 2 subjects that you failed? I think you should go to an FET college and continue there.' It was a bit difficult for me because I didn't know what was going to happen with me here. (FETC Student 8)

You know for some people. Going to high school and getting good marks, so that you may get a bursary to go to varsity⁶⁶...that's a challenge. Because some people are not that smart, no, or that intelligent. So just in case you don't make it in high school, you can always know that you have somewhere to fall back to. (FETC Student 2)

I think the main reason [DHET created the NCV] was that most people they drop out of [secondary] school due to funds problem. (FETC Student 4)

The last student goes on to say that many people may take the NSC, but do not attain a score which qualifies them for admission to university. The learner notes that the FET College and the NCV course offer such students an alternative for continuing with their education.

Nearly all NCV learners emphasize the importance of practical experience in an occupational area, and in doing so starkly contrast their experience at the FET College with their "theory-only" education in secondary school. Here are some quotes from NCV learners emphasizing the importance of practical experience and their hopes of getting a job.

The NCV, the main purpose of the NCV is to enlighten us theoretically and practically ...when I'm in the industry I'll be working onto these things [I studied in the NCV]. (FETC Student 3)

I think the purpose of the NCV is to teach us, maybe they show us, they teach us how to have experience at work because we learn theory together with practical ...it can even be good to do the practical only. (FETC Student 7)

In our country now, there are no jobs for the people. The reason I'm going to the NCV...I didn't know anything about the NCV. Our pastor took us there. We saw that they were doing their studying and they are also doing their practical. In the business practical they are telling us about the contract, about how to dress, the code of conduct, it was all about business ...you need to have a qualification. (FETC Student 9)

⁶⁶ University is often referred to as "varsity" in South Africa.

FET college is about skills...the practicals. The NATED. (FETC Student 1)

However, contrary to the DHET discourse on purpose, which emphasizes that the NCV prepares learners for the workplace and NCV learners' expressed preference for "practical" over "theoretical" learning experiences, NCV learners placed great emphasis on the role of the NCV in helping them transition to further education. Most NCV learners (7/9) I interviewed do not see themselves transitioning directly to the workplace. Several studies suggest that most NCV learners do not transition directly to the workforce (Taylor, 2011 references some of these studies). In this research, we cannot determine if the preference expressed by interviewees is generalizable, or of the extent to which it reflects the low, and in some industries, declining, demand for low-skilled and semi-skilled workers (Bhorat et al., 2013). Learners' preference to continue with their education was linked to their perceptions that the NCV education was not sufficient for transition to work and to their personal aspirations to further their education. Learners note:

My plans are: I'm thinking to go to UNISA. I wanna study further. The way they have explained this curriculum to us, they have said that it's similar to matric [an NSC qualification] so I need more qualifications. (FETC Student 8)

So for myself when I'm done with NCV to be honest I just feel like it's a weak qualification. It's like I have to do something furthermoreLike why do they say its equivalent to matric? If its equivalent to matric they should take it to secondary level then here to the FET we continue with NQ 5, 6, 7 cause it's costing us time. (FETC Student 3)

Two learners expressed an interest in going directly to the workforce. One older learner states, "I will look for a job. A job in the course that I took. Because I'm looking at my age now. I'm 40 and now I'm looking for a job. Later I may study further but I'll study part-time" (FETC Student 9). The other learner states that he will try to start a business using funding from his father. He notes,

I'm currently trying to start my own company. I wanna do a company that will consist of welding and roof work that is what I'm currently trying to do. I'm busy trying to register that company. If things go well, after level 4 I will try focusing on building a company. The NATED thing [further study] I will do it on part-time. Cause I see like nowadays you can try to... you can search for a job but you must have an alternative way not to be like someone who stays at home like you are staying at the corner of the street always asking people money. [later on]

The business thing just came this year because while I was speaking to my dad I just decided that if he can fund me then I can do something. (FETC Student 4)

Some interviewees stated that they just wanted to “do something” or “not stay at home.” While these learners struggled to articulate a purpose of the NCV, they also believed that, if they wanted to do something positive with their lives, enrollment in the NCV program was the best available option to them. Some NCV learners state that they enrolled because they were tired of staying at home, or talk about how they encourage friends who are “staying at home” to do something with their lives and enroll in the NCV. One interviewee states,

To be honest I didn’t have a purpose. I was like let me do my matric, let me go out there to the city and see what will life take me through.To tell you the truth I didn’t know nothing what I was going to do. I just wanted to do something in the engineering faculty but I didn’t know whether mechanical, electrical. (FETC Student 3)

The student continues,

You should come January when students are registering. ...I came early in the morning. I come at five o’clock. I find the queue for electrical its starts from there, goes along this fence then I see a small queue then I decide, no, mechanical I won’t fit there, let me choose this queue just to be a registered, ‘cause sometimes we choose our courses just because of the queues, we wanna do electrical, they tell you electrical is full. You wanna do IT. IT you see the queue is long and you end up choosing mechanic just to be in a certain institution studying something. ... we have [this feeling] every time when we register ‘I don’t wanna be left out’. (FETC Student 3)

Another learner states,

I have two friends where I stay in [name of township]. They were pregnant last year in December so this year they didn’t want to go to school, they were confused, cause they were supposed to write their final and at school they didn’t want to. They said they are written off in the system. So I told them if you don’t wanna go to school [i.e., high school] you can come register for NCV, you can pursue your dreams, you don’t have to stay at home, you can go to [name of FET College]. (FETC Student 5)

Several interviewees identify the FET College and secondary schools as institutions which keep youth off the streets and away from crime. In speaking to the purpose of the NCV, one learner notes, “The problem is that we are not the same in our

families. We try to help people to get something in their lives, because currently we have a problem of crime. We must be trying to minimize that by giving youth the work or the free education” (FETC Student 9). Some FET College learners and lecturers suggest that some NCV learners enroll in the NCV for the sole reason of getting an educational bursary. The bursary supports students’ transportation, food and accommodation). One learner notes, “They’re [some students are] only coming to enroll, get the bursary just to get the money. They [the administration] will call those who are outside... not coming to school, to give them those [ATM] cards” (FETC Student 8). One lecturer agrees, stating, “Here in and out we produce dropouts. We only have two, three graduates every year. ...but they are getting the bursary. ...It looks like our students are here for that. As soon as they receive that money some of them disappear...we have to ask ourselves, ‘what are they here for?’” (FETC Lecturer 3) Research on the Emerging Voices 2 project (Balwanz and Hlatshwayo, 2014) echoes this concern of students enrolling in FET colleges for the sole purpose of getting a living allowance. Is rapid expansion of access to FET colleges a form of social welfare for youth, youth warehousing, or part of a broader effort to keep youth off the street? Several South African researchers and scholars offer this interpretation (Allais & Nathan, 2014; Mnqwazi, 2014). Collins (2013) writes at length on the interrelationship between unemployment, qualification inflation and the hidden Keynesian effects of expansion of access to higher education.

Existential purposes

The second layer of purpose which many learners speak to is existential, aspirational, and future-oriented. Most NSC learners see secondary school as a place to learn about themselves and education as a means to realizing their dreams, even if their dreams are only, as yet, partially formed. Nearly all NSC learners interviewed expressed futuristic or aspirational thinking in which they envision a future self or life-status attainable via success in secondary school and university study. One learner, reflecting on the purpose of education states, “we tend to visualize how we’re going to live in our future” (SS Learner 2). For NSC learners, often the dreams or aspirations they have are constructed in part around particular areas of study, subjects they love or are good at, or careers or jobs in which they’re interested. Here education can offer both a space in

which learners think about their aspirations and a means for realizing them. Of the former, Powell (2013) writes of education as developing the *capability* to aspire: learners conceptualizations of their futures can be expanded through their educational experiences. Frye (2012) equates learners aspirations as an “assertion of identity” – a future identity. From Frye’s perspective, the learner imagines a future identity, and that “assertion of identity” influences the learners’ action and agency in the present.⁶⁷ One learner appears to speak directly to Frye’s interpretation of the relationship between aspiration and present action, noting,

If I know I want to do this with my life, no one can come and say, no change this, change that because I know what I want and I have goals. If I take control of my life, no one can change it and I will get what I want....because if someone says, if you do this you won’t succeed, I know if I study at this time I know that it’s that time where I’m able to concentrate, to focus...so if someone says ‘learning at night, you won’t get anything, you won’t grasp anything’ that person is trying to distract me from my life, what I know and what I believe in...Yeah. (SS Learner 1)

Ten of fourteen NSC learners emphasized the importance of “learning about yourself” and half of learners indicated that learning about yourself played an important role in helping them decide what career interests to pursue. Type of learning valued by learners included exposure to new knowledge and experiences and cultivating imagination and thinking about becoming the ‘person you want to be.’ For many learners, education was a site for the process of “becoming” as indicated in the quotations below.

You know during primary school, you are taking your first steps, you are learning the basics. Here in secondary school, you know we need guidance. We are in our adolescence. We need to be taught about things...it’s [secondary school] supposed to give us a page on how to live when we get older. Secondary school should help us to know what we want and where we want to go. (SS Learner 3)

According to me, education trains the mind as to what is going to happen. ...you can’t tackle everything with knowledge but you need imagination. ... [On tertiary education] it’s about putting more knowledge into my head and doing something that you love. (SS Learner 4)

⁶⁷ Frye (2012) identifies four elements are understood to jointly produce educational success: ambitious career goals, sustained effort, unflagging optimism, and resistance to temptation. Aspirations should be interpreted not as rational calculations, but instead as assertions of a virtuous identity, claims to be “one who aspires.” (p.1565)

Interviewee 2: I think being in secondary school tries to help you to broaden up your mind so that you can face the future out there. Yes. Because there are so many challenges.

Interviewer: ... What types of challenges?

Interviewee2 : ...if you haven't gone to secondary school you don't have matric, you won't qualify at the university...in other words you won't be a person that you want to be, like being successful in life, things like that.

Interviewer: ... what does being successful mean to you?

Interviewee 2: To me being successful means achieving your goals: having a family, a happy one, having a great job, helping people out there. (SS Student 2)

This level of self-awareness is likely not shared by all (or even the majority of) learners.

One secondary school teacher states, "sometimes you gather these children, you tell them about life, you know. ...you have to keep reminding them why they are here. ...why it is important they are doing whatever they are doing. Why they are learning. If they see the importance of what they are doing then they will have the passion" (SS Teacher 2).

Notably, answers to the question, "why are they [the learners] here?" vary depending on the interests and perspectives of the individual answering the question.

There were some outliers on purpose: one learner spoke of the importance of survival skills and two learners said that after secondary school they want to go to university so that they can explore the world and meet new people. On survival skills,

I think the purpose of secondary education is to make people to be ready for the world out there. To survive out there, you know survival skills and to make them know how to make a good living⁶⁸ ...what I'm doing now I'm doing it for the future. ... It prepares me for being an adult and knowing different things and being able to interact with other people and to survive as I said before. (SS Learner 12)

Later on the interviewee adds,

I learn for knowledge. I learn in order to survive. The key word for me is survive. ...When I say survival I mean being able to do such things: To be able to eat, to be able to survive, to be able to have clean water and to be able to be in a place that is much safe and not being able to be in a place that will expose you to things that scare your safety. (SS Learner 12)

⁶⁸ Note here, the phrase "good living" does not appear to mean "material wealth."

NCV learners on the existential purposes of education. When talking about the NCV and explaining their rationale for their choice of occupational area, NCV learners said things like, “I wanna pursue my dreams,” “that’s where I fell in love with studying things of hands,” and “I wanted to do something with my life.” Two quotes from NCV learners show these perspectives.

I told myself I’m not gonna give up. I came here in 2011, registered for office admin then I made it. ...I told myself I wanna pursue my dreams, I wanna be a person. I just won’t sit at home doing nothing. Or get a job because I know I’m not gonna get a perfect, a proper job that I’m looking for then. I got the brochures. Then I saw what the qualifications are, what I can do then. I started registering for office administration in 2011. Then I made it, I passed all my subjects in 2011. In 2012 I passed all my subjects now I’m in the exit level. (FETC Student 5)

They took me to the school of hands ...that’s where I fell in love with studying things of handsSo after that I decided I could go to FET and pursue my dream of becoming a carpenter and roof worker, that’s the reason why I came here. ...NCV helps students who don’t have a matric so that they can pursue their dreams, they could further their studies. (FETC Student 4)

In the quotes above, NCV learners, like NSC learners, speak to a broader purpose of education, to develop “aspired identities”, to follow their dreams and passions, to become more complete human beings, or to do something that they love. One learner notes, “I had to sit at home for a while...but I wanted to do something with my life. ...I can see that I’m going somewhere with this” (FETC Student 6). Later on the learner adds, “You know, for many people you can finish matric and you don’t get a job. ...or you get a job at Shoprite, Pick n Pay or Checkers [local grocery stores]. What’s the point of working that job if you can go somewhere and get a skill?” (FETC Student 6) In this exchange, the interviewee indicates that she can get a job, but that for her, education has a broader purpose. In my notes from the interview I write “we talk a bit about working in these types of jobs [at local grocery stores]. Some people work at these jobs, but the interviewee thinks that to realize some of her dreams, she wants to develop more skills....the interviewee has different interests.”

Youth recognize some of the contradictions or trade-offs in education: NSC learners want more flexibility in their schedule to pursue other interests and passions but are willing to focus on “learning to pass” seven subjects so that they can continue to

university. NCV learners value the practical focus of the NCV curriculum, but most saw attaining a level four qualification as critical to attaining their goal of going to university. Even for the NCV learners focused on getting a job, the job was not the end goal in and of itself. The learners wanted some income and independence, and to gain that by studying in a field in which there were job opportunities, in which they were capable and that they enjoyed. Some NCV learners expressed that they are not enrolled in a course of study that is their top choice, but that they just want to be doing something and going somewhere, as opposed to “staying at home.”⁶⁹

In earlier chapters, I provide evidence that a large number of jobs in South Africa are in the services sector – so not everyone can be a professional. Reflection on the political economy of skills in South Africa (i.e., to what extent is South Africa a high-skill or low-skill economy?) would raise several questions: How many jobs in South Africa require nothing further than a secondary school education? Is expansion of FET college access promoting qualification inflation? In terms of the relationship between poverty, unemployment and inequality, should we focus on improving the pay and working conditions in low-skill sectors? Alternatively, we could ask, “should education nurture other interests and passions so that all adults can live fuller and more meaningful lives outside of their jobs?” What if issues of financial security and independence were taken off the table through a guaranteed income stream? How then would learners define the purpose of education? Or, think about job or career choices?

Other perspectives: two paths or holistic development

In addition to NSC and NCV learners, I interviewed people who worked at district and national policy levels on secondary education as well as teachers and lecturers at the two study sites. Adult interviewees spoke to structural issues and dilemmas facing policymakers and educators, were critical of the excessive university-preparation and test focus of secondary education, and, in general, argued in favor of more practical experience and skills development. Nearly all interviewees spoke in terms of the instrumental logic of the two paths model: that secondary school should prepare youth for further study and for the world of work. Notably, and in stark contrast to the NSC

⁶⁹ Staying at home is seen in a negative light by all learners who mentioned it. Many appeared to think that there was no future in staying at home.

learners, adult interviewees who talked about the NSC indicated that the majority of secondary school leavers would not transition directly to university. My interview with a DBE staff member who works on curriculum articulates the structural dilemma of the two paths model.

If you look at the number of learners who passed matric, remember it increased and we say, ‘can universities absorb these learners?’ As you know most universities take about 30 percent...so what happens to the 70 percent of learners who exit the system? So we looked... as policy say, we need now to look at the NDP [National Development Plan]. We need artisans.

Remember during the 2010 World Cup how we had to import artisans in this country – welders, I mean because we didn’t have enough welders so now we are saying let’s increase the participation in technical subjects in high schools. So I mean universities can’t take the flood of learners who want to go the academic route ...and reality says we need more artisans in this country. ...universities are saying we can only absorb 30 percent, what happens to 70 percent? (Policy 3)

A district-level DBE staff member echoes national discourse, promoting skills development, but with less optimism.

So I think the focus even there [with the introduction of the new curriculum] has been ‘we realise that not all children can go into university, to have the opportunity to actually do an internship at a company group or telephone company or whatever.’ Realistically what we are trying to do is to say is that when children finish secondary school they either find a job or start creating something for themselves. Which is really a high dream. In some cases I would say schools where they really take care of their learners, they focus on how they can produce those citizens that would go out after school, they might succeed. But in schools where they just focus on teaching; for the child to go up to grade 8, grade 9, 10, 11, 12 you might find that those children might go out and they may leave the schooling system without skills. So I would say yes the high dream is to let children go out of the schooling system being able to find a decent job or to study further but in reality I know how many children finish and have a grade 12 certificate and they are still roaming the streets. (Policy 2)

NSC teachers and two other adult interviewees appeared to struggle greatly with the issue of what to do with NSC graduates and high school dropouts that were not likely to attend university. Their responses often appeared strained given their awareness that the economy was not absorbing the large number of youth leaving schools into jobs. Recognizing that many learners would not go to university, many interviewees drew on the language of the skills discourse, arguing that secondary education should do a better

job of preparing learners with skills, specifically skills which would make learners more employable and which were relevant to the future lives, income-generation and livelihood needs of learners. In the exchange below, two teachers lament the academic focus of secondary school and argue for a stronger focus on skills development.

Interviewer: What about those who don't go to varsity?

Interviewee 3: [secondary school] concentrates way too much on studying to go to university. We need to think about employability. I am not saying that to offend them [the learners]. Some are not academic, some are not the type.

Interviewee 4: And we concentrate way too much on the maths and sciences.

Interviewee 3: And the students we find, they are not the varsity type. Our pass rates are level 2 and level 3 but with the quality most pass with level 2, which is not enough for university. ... [learners] need skills to do something. We need to have business people come and motivate them, teach them how to have skills. When we were in school we would have consumer studies, you in the U.S. call it home economics... I learned how to sew, how to knit, how to bake and how to cook. I still use these skills! I knit hats and scarfs and sell them. ...If you don't pass matric, you have nowhere to go. The future is not only in academics. I wish I could be the Minister and could make some decisions. (SS Teachers 3 and 4)

A teacher at the same school echoes some of the sentiments, noting, "there's one lady we're working with in this school. She's a fashion designer. She's pushing, she's a teacher this side and then after school she's working. And she makes a lot of money" (SS Teacher 1).⁷⁰ While all NSC teachers I interviewed indicated that "we need to do a better job relating to the job market" (SS Teacher 2), when I ask teachers about specific skills, some of them struggle, before coming up with skills like, "welding, building, plaiting, landscaping" (SS Teacher 3). Are these the skills which should be taught in secondary school?

One teacher differentiated between skills development at secondary school and training to reduce unemployment. Secondary school, he said, should emphasize higher level cognitive skills such as "thinking skills, problem solving skills, language development skills, vocabulary" along with "critical thinking skills, creativity" (SS Teacher 1). To address the issue of unemployment, however, the teacher argues for

⁷⁰ Incidentally, it appeared that two of the four secondary school teachers with whom I spoke have outside income generation activities. One teacher spoke to the low level of salaries.

expansion of training and apprenticeships at the post-secondary level. An interviewee working at the district level speaks to the failure of skills development in terms of inequality. Wealthier schools have more resources, better, more motivated teachers and offer a wider array of subjects. She notes, “I know it for a fact that parents from township communities will really offer everything for their children to attend at ex-model C schools in town...in townships we might find there is Computer Application Technology, in model C schools we find subjects like IT which obviously mean children get a better chance going into that sector” (Policy 2).

At the national level the skills questions that are being asked are, “are up-to-date in saying what does the country need? What are the needs of the country because we need to grow the economy?” (Policy 3) Based on the perception that South Africa needs more artisans, the Department for Basic Education is instituting a curriculum reform and recapitalization of technical secondary schools. Here the purpose of secondary education is seen as preparing learners “for the kind of specialization they are supposed to do,” with secondary education giving youth the “foundations to start specialization” (Policy 3). However, it is easy to find data which suggests that supply side interventions are vulnerable to the agency and interests of learners. The number of secondary school learners “taking the technical subjects has decreased” (Policy 3).⁷¹ Can a Ministry exhortation, hope springs eternal, change this tide? The interviewee states, “we are hoping by having our specializations [in technical high schools] then we will have more and more learners [enrolled in technical NSC subjects]” (Policy 3).

Several analyses of South Africa labor market data over the past decade point to a shift in the labor market from low-skilled and semi-skilled work to skilled work. Meanwhile, jobs in the skilled and tertiary sector professions realized both comparatively higher job growth and wage growth (Bhorat et al., 2013 offers extensive discussion on this issue). As in Chile (and it’s arguably failed vocational reform in secondary schools) perhaps learners’ are making rational decisions, career-wise and wage wise, to preference education which facilitates their access to professional, high skill and tertiary sector occupations even if this dream will only be realized by a third of those who aspire to it

⁷¹ Matric data echo this statement: the number of learners taking NSC exams in artisanal subjects is either stagnant or declining (DBE, 2013).

(Balwanz, 2011). Adult interviewees do not limit their conceptualizations of purpose to the two paths model or skills discourses. Many also speak to the importance of holistic development.

Holistic development. As with NSC learners, nearly all other adult interviewees commenting on the NSC identified the importance of learners' holistic development. One teacher captures this sentiment, noting, "education should cover a person holistically: Mentally, physically, emotional development in every aspect of their life. It's not just teaching and learning. Learners need to be kept physically active, they need to be emotionally intelligent, they need to know how to make decisions. A school should be a place where they...But it's not happening" (SS Teacher 4). An adult interviewee who used to be a teacher and a principal at a secondary school, notes,

I would honestly say that, and this is maybe something that I'm passionate about, it's to say that the holistic development of the child it is not happening, it is not happening at the majority of our schools meaning that if we only focus on achieving results and meet certain targets [trails off]... You cannot expect of a child to start schooling at 6:30 in the morning for morning classes and go throughout the afternoon until 4 -5 o'clock being involved in extra classes and never having an opportunity to go out to choir practice or soccer practice or whatever is available so I really think that should be looked at. Or to revisit the model and say, we only think of extra murals in terms of sporting activities and maybe expanding to look at other things that children have interest in. Maybe saying let's look at that in terms of the area where the school is located and the type of children because obviously children do differ in their interest and fields of interests. (Policy 2)

Secondary school teachers despair at the test focus evident in the current system and associate with it insufficient support of extra-curricular activities and inadequate exposure of youth to a broader set of learning experiences. All secondary school teachers interviewed argue that the conception of secondary education as manifested in their school is too narrow: some secondary school teachers argue for abolishing "learning areas" which track NCS learners in seven subjects for the final three grades of secondary school and others argue for more robust support of extracurricular activities to support learners' holistic development. Several teachers speak of the extent to which negative influences in the community (e.g., drugs, violence, and criminality) impact learners' lives and their engagement in secondary school. One teacher makes an explicit link between learners' participation in education and creating a more civilized society. After discussing

the importance of preparing learners for university and the world of work, the teacher notes,

And maybe above all just to create this type of human being just to have a civil society. And I believe for us to have a civil society, a civilized society, you need people who are equipped with education. ... Here especially in South Africa you look at the crime rate We look at the root cause and say what is this root cause of that? Yes they are unemployed some of them. Crime is caused by unemployment, poverty, and all that. But we are saying if you instill some education in some of them, yes education can change all that. I'm not saying it has been proven to say that it changes crime but I'm talking about what I have seen myself. I also come from a very poor background and properly if I did acquire this education I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have an honest job. So we are saying if they also acquire that education, it might solve some of these societal problems we are facing. (SS Teacher 2)

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FET College Lecturers on the instrumental and the existential. FET College lecturers see the NCV as a “last chance” for many learners and accordingly recognize the instrumental role of the NCV in helping students attain a level 4 qualification. One lecturer notes, “many of them come from grade ten or eleven. They see us as their last chance. If we don't give them a chance...” (FETC Lecturer 3). Notably, only one of FET College lecturers echoes the dominant discourse adding that the provision of practical skills will also allow learners to be “self-employable” (FETC Lecturer 1). Other lecturers seriously question the purpose of the NCV for several reasons: the perceived low standard of the qualification, the high rates of dropout at the FET College, the mix of learners with significantly different levels of academic preparedness and the low likelihood that NCV graduates will transition directly to the labor market. When asked about the purpose of the NCV, one lecturer balks. She is surprised at the question. I wait. Then she blurts out,

You got me there!!! Personally I don't see the purpose. You can't mix a grade 10 with a matric [grade 12 learner].⁷² The enrollment process is a problem. The standard of the curriculum is low, very low. (FETC Lecturer 3)

These concerns are echoed in interviews with other NCV learners and key informants, as well as in public discourse, which seriously questions the value of the NCV. In another interview, a DBE policymaker argues for eliminating the NCV at FET colleges stating,

⁷² The lecturer later explains that the reason you cannot mix learners is because of the immature attitude of younger learners and the lower level of academic preparedness of some learners.

“what we’ve found and I’m sure you have heard this all over again and you were appalled. Our [NSC holding] learners ...go to FET colleges and they start [all over again]. It doesn’t make sense.” I mention that learners and lecturers think they’re wasting time to which she responds, “Exactly! So we are saying we need to eliminate that” (Policy 3). Similar sentiments are widely vocalized in the South African academic and policy community (City Press, 2012; Taylor, 2011).

When FET College lecturers talk about existential purposes of education, some of them are deliberate in distinguishing learners’ experience at the FET College from learners’ secondary school experiences. Lecturers speak of the FET College as providing a space for student self-expression, a venue for exposing learners to new knowledge and experiences and a place where learners can constructively fail. One lecturer speaks to these issues.

They think here they have an opportunity to express, to explain, to elaborate. I believe where they come from they have not been able to do this. They learn thinking skills. How to solve problems...when they come here they will be uplifted. They don’t have self-esteem, they don’t believe in themselves.

It’s like where they come from before they were never given an opportunity to talk ...they need to be given a chance to express themselves. They should get used to talking. If you give them a chance to talk, your class will always be full. (FETC Lecturer 3)

Later on the same lecturer adds,

Learning to be empowered and developed and skilled...I’m struggling with the language... empowered meaning to act in a different waysome learners they think, when I’m here I’m just using my hands, now they use their heads. (FETC Lecturer 3)

In some ways, the lecturer seeks to deconstruct learners’ identities as “academic failures” and “not that intelligent” and reconstruct them with experiences which demonstrate their capacity to think and act critically. On constructive failure, one learner notes, “I discovered when I registered in [College Name] that I wasn’t good in tourism. I saw I wasn’t good in tourism because I failed all my subjects. ... the subject that I took it wasn’t the right fit for me. When I came here I saw that I was good in office administration” (FETC Student 5). One lecturer outlines the process she follows to get learners to discover themselves. “I wait until the first exam and we see how they do.

And some of them [don't perform well]. Then you start interfering and once you interfere, they open up. We've got learners who are still young, who come from poor families, who head the household, who are living by themselves." Later on she adds, "I am tough on them. Some of them fail...but they learned they had to fail to move on. I teach them to understand they have different talents" (FETC Lecturer 2).

As with NSC learners and teachers, FET College lecturers identify the lack of extra-curricular activities and exposure to different types of learning experiences as an important problem. One lecturer notes, "the real reason they're here [the learners], they're not sure of. ...They need to be exposed to things. They need to make decisions on what careers they want. There are no field trips. We need exhibitions, field trips, visitors and researchers to come and talk to them" (FETC Lecturer 2).

Learning experiences, learning priorities

Secondary school

The tyranny of learning areas

The NSC learners I interviewed were all tracked within a particular learning area: the sciences stream. Many of the learners in the sciences stream appeared to be "university bound" and in a separate track from other learners. In South Africa, Grade 9 is recognized as the end of basic education, and Grades 10-12 are envisioned as a time for specialization in a particular academic stream or occupational area. In the learning areas, learners are tracked from grade 10 through grade 12 and take the same seven subjects three years in a row. Nearly all NSC learners I interviewed critiqued the practice of learning areas in some way. Many learners spoke to the "pressure" of choosing your future in grade 10. Other learners mentioned that the practice of learning areas left them with no space to learn other subjects. A few learners stated that learning the same subject three years in a row was, that favorite descriptor of students the world over, boring. Over half of the learners I interviewed expressed interests in taking other subjects such as accounting, art, engineering, and tourism. Some of the issues identified by learners emerge in the below two exchanges.

Interviewer: Is there a subject or a course that you would like to take if you weren't taking this path?

Interviewee 12: You know I have never thought about it. Maybe Tourism. In the market there are too many tour guides and people who do tourist things. I will be qualified but still staying at home because there are too many people out there.

Interviewer: *Talking to the other interviewee.* What about you? Are there subjects or courses that you would want to take that you are not taking?

Interviewee 11: Yes there are. I will probably take Geography, Tourism and History because I'm very good at history. I know history very, very well. And Geography. Because I was always fascinated by the weather as a child. I have always wondered, how does a tornado have such power? How does thunder clouds... you know that sort of stuff so I will probably take Geography and History and Tourism. ... For me I really want to follow my career because right now it's my passion, it's what I really, really want but I don't mind taking them [other subjects] if we were given an option. (SS Learners 11 and 12)

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Interviewee 2: Yes there are things like technical subjects...there are many learners who would like to be engineers sometime...

Interviewer: Engineers here?

Interviewee 2: Yes but they do not have that exposure. There are schools –former Model C schools where they have time to go to the lab or to the workshop where they work with things and produce stuff. Like art, we don't have Art here; the only Art we have is the Art that we do from Grade 1 to Grade 9. If you want to pursue a career in the art world, you have to do it for the rest of your life. But if you do the subjects I'm doing now, go to university, go back to art you will lose interest while carrying on with your mathematics and economics; you will lose interest in your art. (SS Learner 8)

Here learners speak to their interest in other subjects, but also some of the other factors which influence the subjects they take: Will they get a job in tourism? Will taking other subjects distract them from their career path? Is the subject offered at the school?

Reinforcing the systemic focus on the sciences, SS Learner 12 notes, "Well I was told that if you want to be successful in life, which I would really like to be, you should take this path of mathematics and science because you've got few doctors." Many learners expressed interests they were unable to pursue at school, or no longer had time for, as indicated in the below exchange.

Interviewee: ...My abilities I'm not sure about them. Ability is something you can do, right?

Interviewer: Ya.

Interviewee: I can express something like poetry

Interviewer: Do you write your own or do you look at other poetry and know how to recite them?

Interviewee: No I do that on my own.

Interviewer: Do you do that inside of school or outside?

Interviewee: Outside because at school we are not given a chance to do that.

[later on]

Interviewee: I wanna be an actress or a presenter

Interviewer: Do you want to read the news or you want to be on *Generations* [a popular soap opera]?

Interviewee: To be on *Generations*.

Interviewer: Do you do any sort of drama here or outside of school?

Interviewee: I was doing it here at school but now because of my school work I don't have time to continue but when I do acting I do drama. (SS Learner 13)

Two teachers I interviewed agreed that the practice of learning areas is "ridiculous." One stated, "I think they should bring back the way in which we did our studies where you could [freely choose to] take Geography, History, Physical Science. ... We used to take eleven subjects from Grade 8, that's what we should be doing. We did History, we did Geography, then they [learners] will know what they are interested in" (SS Teacher 3). Both teachers in this interview (SS Teachers 3 and 4) concluded with a recommendation that school do away with learning areas and let learners choose their own subjects. This perspective was not shared by one teacher who notes, "you find a student doing Physical Science and...Accounting and ...Geography. Now it's a mix up of subjects and I say 'what you are really doing?' ...we say we are diversifying, but we are killing the students ...if they are doing [the] sciences [stream], let them do the subjects" (SS Teacher 2).⁷³

It is worth asking, to what extent is the choice of learning areas really a choice? Ambitious, high achieving learners may think that the sciences learning area offers them the best chance of getting into university. One learner suggests that many of his peers are studying the wrong thing. He offers a hypothetical example, stating,

⁷³ A concern expressed by several adult participants about learners in the science stream is that a learner will be taking Physical Science and Mathematical Literacy. Instead learners should be advised to take Pure Mathematics so as to correspond with the material in the Physical Science curriculum.

We have a lot of people who ended up doing, studying astronomy and they are not meant to be astronomers. A lot of people study things which are out of, I cannot say out of their league, but things that they do not even have love for. I cannot go and do teaching because I don't have love for teaching.

...If I'm doing nursing obviously I'm dealing with patients. If I don't have the love for nursing then it wouldn't be for the benefit of those people that I'm saying I'm assisting. (SS Learner 12)

"So your extra-curricular activities are more classes?"

Exam pressure and "banking" education. In the final three grades of secondary school learners focus on preparing for National Senior Certificate which is taken at the end of the Grade 12 academic year. Learners can attain one of five NSC results: Bachelor, Diploma, Certificate, NSC (a mere pass) and Fail. The first three results indicate the tertiary program (Degree, Diploma, Certificate) to which the learner allowed entry. While a good NSC score is recognized as critical to university placement, many learners apply for university admission in Grade 11. In addition, many South African universities urge learners to take the National Benchmark Test, a separate exam with similarities to the SAT, which purportedly evaluates the academic readiness of potential university students. While the path to university is more complicated than simply securing a good result on the NSC, most teachers and learners (as well as DBE and GDE policy, planning and curriculum documents) appear to characterize the secondary school experience as being organized around NSC preparation.

Most learners I interviewed characterize their secondary school experience as one of attending lectures, taking notes and taking multiple practice exams in several subjects followed by real exams. The pressure of the NSC appeared to especially affect Grade 12 learners who gave the impression that they were often asked to drop "everything" so that they could prepare for the NSC. Grade 12 learners said they spent six or seven days a week in class. A number of Grade 11 learners I interviewed also indicated that they were participating in external test preparation programs. One learner noted, "on Saturday and Sunday we have Grade 12 matric prep. ...on Saturday [it] is from 8-12. On Sunday, from 10-12" (SS Learner 3). Six learners spoke of extra classes and weekend classes as their only extra-curricular activities. I asked one pair of learners what extracurricular activities

they were involved in and they mentioned a test prep program. I responded, “So your extra-curricular activities are more classes?” “Yes?” The full exchange is below.

Interviewer: ...I heard from other students that next week it's [an] exam in maths, Physics and Economics. Are you taking tests this week?

Interviewee 1 and 2: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok.

Interviewee1: We're writing one today...Physics test.

Interviewer: When do you write it?

Interviewee1: Early today.

Interviewer: And tomorrow, Economics?

Interviewee 1 and 2: Yes. After school.

Interviewer: And also you have exams next week, right?

Interviewee 1: And on Friday we're writing, Paper 2, Home Language and English

Interviewer: So it seems like you're doing exams all the time.

Interviewee 1 and 2: Yeah.

Interviewer: Or maybe not all the time, I might be exaggerating.

Interviewee 1: No, at the beginning of the year, every Monday we used to write exams.

Interviewee 2: Class tests.

...

Interviewee 1: ...you spend most of your time trying to practice and sometimes we can't cover the whole syllabus because we're...

Interviewer: Ah because you're taking time.

Interviewee 1: Yes, you're taking most of your time. If I'm writing maths tomorrow I know that for the whole day today I have to practice maths because I will get equations that are difficult so if most of my time it's on maths that means I can't do Life Science, I can't do Physics. I can't study other subjects.

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Interviewer: What you mentioned earlier about extra-curricular activities, we didn't explore that very much. Are either of you involved in extra-curricular activities?

Interviewee 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh really, what are you doing?

Interviewee 1: On weekends we come to school. We have extra classes on Physics, maths and Economics and Life Science.

Interviewer: So you both attend classes on Sundays?

Interviewee 1 and 2: Yes

Interviewer: Is that part of the Secondary School Improvement Programme?

Interviewee 1: And after school we also have afternoon classes and in the morning we have morning classes here at school.

Interviewer: So your extra-curricular activities are more classes?

Interviewee 1 and 2: Yes. (SS Learners 1 and 2)

Several learners argue that the pressure of exams leaves them feeling stressed. One learner notes, “Honestly I have been studying from January, now I just need a break to calm my nerves and my mind.” She continues, “When you are doing grade 12 everyone looks at you, we want to see you in the newspaper, you have to pass with distinctions. You know it gets to you” (SS Learner 10). One learner notes, “mostly when we come back (home) from school you’re too stressed. We need sports...or something in-between” (SS Learner 3). The figure below shows the morning and afternoon class schedule for the secondary school. The purported goal of the classes (morning classes from 7:00-7:45 and afternoon classes from 14:45-15:45) is to ensure that the Grade 12 syllabus in key subjects is covered by the end August.

Figure 10: Extra class schedule at the secondary school

EXTRA – CLASSES : GRADE 12		
TERM 3		
AIM: TO COVER THE SYLLABI BY THE END OF AUGUST AND HAVE AMPLE TIME		
DURATION: MORNING- 07-07:45		
AFTERNOON: 14:45 – 15:45		
DAY	CLASS	LEARNING AREA
MORNINGS		
MONDAY	12C	ECONOMICS
TUESDAY	12A	ECONOMICS
	12B	ACCOUNTING
AFTERNOONS		
MONDAYS	12A /B	MATHEMATICS
	12C	MATHS-LIT
	12D	B.STUDIES
	12E	MATHS-LIT
	12F	TOURISM
TUESDAYS	12A	PHYSICS
	12B	PHYSICS
	12B	ACCOUNTING
	12C	TOURISM
	12D	CONSUMER
	12E	GEOGRAPHY
WEDNESDAY	12F	MATHS-LIT
	12A	LIFE-SCIENCES
	12B	ECONOMICS
	12C	S.SOTHO
	12D	TOURISM
THURSDAY	12E	TOURISM
	12F	GEOGRAPHY
	12A	MATHEMATICS
	12B	LIFE-SCIENCES
	12B	ACCOUNTING
	12C	B.STUDIES
	12D	MATHS-LIT
	12E	S.SOTHO
	12F	S.SOTHO

Banking education. The influence of exams appeared to encourage a banking model of education (Freire, 2003). Characteristics of banking education include teacher-centered instruction, teachers writing and students copying notes on the chalkboard, and learners seeking to learn and memorize information so it can be repeated later, in class or on an exam. Ten of fourteen learners described classroom learning in ways that made school sound like a test preparation course. The below exchange details an argument between teachers and students that demonstrates the extent to which exam pressure influences classroom instruction and learners' understandings of knowledge and learning in secondary school.

Interviewee 12: We had an argument in the class on why do we skip some things. And we were told that is how the syllabus is, the way the book was written so to speak. We were told that the way it is written is the way the author wanted or the way how s/he wanted the knowledge to be passed on. ...So like right now we are not supposed to go into detail...So you only learn the basics instead of us going into detail. 'Where is the diaphragm attached?' We only do the brush ups cause the curriculum only wants us to do those so the work schedule of the teachers is only focusing on those light things. And not into detail. I think we are only doing those things because we are told 'we teach you these things so that they will be asked at the exam and you should pass them not that you should just learn them.' [emphasis mine] You are supposed to learn them and know them but when it comes to exam you are going to be asked around this. So these other ones [types of knowledge] that may not come in the exam, don't worry much about them.

Interviewer: Someone told me they distinguish between 'learning to pass' and 'learning to understand.' What do you think about that?

Interviewee 12: Yes they do because as I have just said right now it's because you lean to pass and the teachers say you should go and study for you to pass, not to understand. And to pass is so easy because you can pass without understanding something...there is this method we call it the CPF (Cram, Pass, Forget). That is what we mostly do so we say tomorrow morning I'll be writing such test so I just have to cram and then I pass and I forget, without understanding.

Interviewer: Is the normal culture at this school learning to pass or understand?

Interviewee 11: Its simple, its learning to pass because there is this pressure that if you don't pass you is going to fail and you are going to end nowhere. (SS Learners 11 & 12)

Another learner speaks to the same issue, saying, "we think the most important thing is studying the exam because you study for the exam and after that you forget that

thing. You don't go back to it. You just have that mentality; it was just for the exam. And then when you go to the next grade you are asked the same question and you still can't answer it because you studied for the exam, you crammed for the exam. That's how much pressure exams put on us" (SS Learner 10).

The above quoted learners touch on a number of issues. The learning environment is defined by what's at stake: getting a high pass on the NSC. This pressure pervades the system. DBE district staff, the school board, principals, and teachers are aware of what is required to pass the NSC and of the importance of a school posting a high NSC pass rate. What this often means is that classroom instruction focuses on the selective presentation of knowledge based on an expectation of what information is going to be on the exam. This type of instruction, and associated practice exams, become meaningful activities to teachers and learners based on the importance given to the NSC. Since the exam is perceived to be the final goal, then "learning to pass" methods, like Cram Pass Forget, become part of the learning culture at the school. Two other students speak to these issues.

Interviewee 3: I need to pass them [exams] if ever my future will be bright. ...if you study you can do a lot of things.

...

Interviewee 4: This week we're writing some practice exams. This week we're taking practice exams in maths, Physics and Econ. We have [real] exams next week.

Interviewee 3: for me they're showing us what to do, it's good to give us practice tests so that we can do better on the real test. (SS Learners 3 & 4)

When I asked learners to talk about different type of learning they valued (in the next section), several learners selected "learning in different subjects or occupational areas." In speaking to this topic, many learners talked about their interest in a particular subject matter, in having a career, or about going to university. Only one learner spoke about learning as applicable to his life situation and context. He notes,

[Learning in different subject areas] is an important part of learning. If I know English then I can talk to you. You are from the States and I'm from South Africa. ...The main language that you use is English. You know a little bit of IsiZulu and you only know the basics. We cannot communicate with basics and in order to make relationships. Mathematics is very important to me in order to know that my yard is this big in squares. To compare that this kettle is bigger than this. To know

my size. I wear size 8 but I cannot say I wear size 8 if I don't know the numbers. Then science. Science is...I think science is also important although I think it's up to a person to know science. It's about everything, what is the cause for us not to go up forever, to jump up, to know that there is gravity and it's always taking us down. (SS Learner 12)

What was disconcerting to me about learners' elaborations on "learning in different subjects or occupational areas?" When learners speak of other types of learning that are valuable to them, they are more immediate in speaking to how the learning relates to their personal experience, interests, and contexts. When learners talk about subjects, they shift to instrumental language.

In my first meeting with the principle of the secondary school, he said, "the only thing DBE cares about is matric [NSC pass rates]." This concern is echoed by secondary school teachers who agree that "the administration, the government and the Ministry of Education" focus on Grade 12 learners and NSC results (SS Teacher 2). The same teacher, speaks to the issue of banking education, saying,

They write these June exams and they [the learners] are not even worried about them like [as if to say] it is [not] important in my life. 'I write this exam, I pass this exam,' it isn't important to them ... I'm also blaming that on us as schools, the Department of Education to say we have not done our job to instill some academic culture in these students. Academic culture is lacking, there is no academic culture for them to know why they are really doing this. (SS Teacher 2)

The district-level officer says, "I'm not saying it's totally wrong. Obviously pushing people to perform better...but what I'm seeing is focusing only on the academic results does not mean the schooling and the education that the child was receiving is of good quality" (Policy 2)

Two learners expressed dissenting opinions and said that the school is not putting too much pressure on exam performance. The learners indicated that regular classroom assessment plays a constructive role in their learning. However, even here, this learning is purposed toward passing exams.

Interviewee 14: No they are not putting too much pressure on us. The reason I say that is that when they give us tests weekly not like in terms like term 1, 2 & 3. When you are writing tests in term 1, 2 & 3 it's a must so that you know I'm going to the next grade. But the weekly tests are the ones where you can recognize where you have went wrong about something and what you really don't get so that you can go back to that thing and start doing it. So it's where you can

rectify your mistakes so that for the term tests or the final tests you can be able to do a particular thing.

...

Interviewee 13: I think the monthly tests or the term test they are just trying to read our brains, just to see whether we are focused on our books so that we can work so that when exams come we don't have difficulties. (SS Learners 13 and 14)

The intensive focus on exams also appears to effect syllabus coverage (according to 4 of 14 learners) and use of instructional time. One learner notes,

Sometimes ...you get a question and you are totally doomed due to not covering the syllabus. You ended up at term 3's work or you just covered one question from term 4's work but there are question in the exam that require you to have knowledge on that chapter. And you get that because we were spending time on revision, revising questions that do not come. And we are busy with exams because we write exams every term- term 1 to term 4 we write exams. Not only the formal exams but now and then we have cycle tests in class and subject tasks and.... There is just a lot of stuff to do and so little time. (SS Learner 9)

This concern is echoed by a teacher who agrees that there is "not enough time to cover the curriculum" (SS Teacher 1). Another teacher notes, "in the class you are trying to get learners to understand, but time is just going by and you, you find out you are behind and then you are trying to push (to cover the rest of the material quickly)" (SS Teacher 3). Of course, exams may be but one of several factors which explain insufficient syllabus coverage. One teacher expresses frustration at teaching learners to pass and figuring out which topics to teach based on the coverage of the topic on exams.

It's really frustrating to teach learners to pass when they haven't been prepared. ...Every term we have reported speech and passive voice [topics in English] and we're going over it often, but when you look at the exam, there is only one question worth three marks on it. (SS Teacher 3)

One learner states that when exams are taking place "a lot of time is wasted." She continues, "during exams you come to school at nine, maybe it's a two hour paper. When you finish your paper you just hand it in. It doesn't matter where you go to maybe it's 12, 1, 2, and 3. At home they expect you at 2:30. During exam time we've got so much time for ourselves because when you write exams it's not a normal school day. You just come

write and go so that time is also wasted because we could be doing some work to just continue with the syllabus” (SS Learner 10).

Many teachers said they felt they were held responsible for their learners’ poor performance, despite the poor foundational preparation of learners. Some learners saw exam failure as a blow to their confidence and self-esteem. Of exam pressure, one learner states, “when you are going grade 11that is when a lot of pressure is starting. I wish I could go back to Grade 8, it was so fun” (SS Learner 9). What are the NSC results at the secondary school: In 2013, 87% of learners in Gauteng province passed the NSC, compared to 83% in the district and less than 75% at the secondary school where I conducted interviews (DBE, 2014b).

Less theory, more practical

Nearly half of the NSC learners lamented the lack of practical learning in secondary school, the inadequately equipped and insufficiently used science lab and the extensive practice of “chalk and talk.” Since all of the learners I interviewed are in the science stream, many of them are critical of the absence of practical learning experiences. Speaking of labs, learners note,

Number 1, our lab is not properly equipped. We lack equipment so sometimes it’s just theory. We have to do practicals. We are told from the district we have to do practicals but we do not have the equipment so we end up doing it theoretically. (SS Learner 9)

Let’s say for Physics maybe there is this practical that you need to do for motion and then maybe the teacher before the current one did that and [the current teacher] is lazy to do that. They will take those scripts for us to just copy everything, just change your name or doing everything and then submit instead of doing it practically. It’s costing us at the same time this is why some people say school is boring because we are just doing things. (SS Learner 12)⁷⁴

Speaking to what he wants, one learner says,

I think they should change the teaching methods in a way that learners feel free to sit in class and interact with the teacher because I feel that the method of teaching that is being used is boring. Like to sit in class for seven hours with different teachers coming and going out it’s boring. It’s boring. It would be easy ...if we could see get an animalLike last year in Biology when we were doing a study

⁷⁴ Another student notes, “we’ll be doing an experiment and we’ll be doing it on the chalkboard” (SS Learner 3).

of the heart. We got a real heart. A pig heart. Like you can dissect, feel it, touch.
(SS Learner 8)

Arguing for the introduction of tablets, email and other learning technology, one learner notes,

Yes, sometimes they [teachers] put lots of notes on the chalk board so you spend the whole period writing those notes. That means there is no teaching and learning because you just waste the chalkboard and write. That means...the teacher has to come the following day to explain those notes. So if she writes them on her computer, she sends it to everyone,...then you discuss everything in the class so...rather than writing the following day that's when she will come and explain.
(SS Learner 1)

These critiques of secondary school are echoed by FET College learners in the next chapter.

What types of learning are valued?

In individual interviews, after engaging interviewees in a general discussion on the purpose of secondary education, I involved them in card sort exercise. In the exercise, I gave interviewees nine cards. On each card was printed a different type of learning (see table below).⁷⁵ Learners were asked, “What types of learning are most important to you?” and instructed to identify three cards to answer the question.⁷⁶ The purpose of the exercise was twofold. First, I wanted to get a sense of the types of learning that interviewees valued and then compare it with the types of learning and education valued at the secondary school and in the skills discourse. Second, this question provided an entry point for discussing, in some detail, specific learning experiences which interviewees valued. Table 24 identifies the quantitative results of the card sort exercise for NSC and NCV learners. It is worth noting that by asking interviewees to choose, I tacitly denied them the opportunity to speak to other learning possibilities in secondary education. For example, very few learners chose “learning through extra-curricular

⁷⁵ My choices for the selecting the nine different types of learning were based on my close review of the literature reviewed on human development and the skills discourse. The Delors report and literature on youth development also helped. There is, of course, no objective method for determining which types of learning I included on the cards I asked participants to speak to.

⁷⁶ Some participant took two, some took three, some took four cards. Originally, I planned to ask two questions. First, “What types of learning are valued in this school?” and second, “What types of learning are most important to you?” In the first few interviews this proved to be a confusing, and time consuming task, so I opted to focus on what participants valued, and use my own observation from other data to identify what types of learning were valued in study schools.

activities,” however, many learners and lecturers identified (in other parts of the interview) the need for, or importance of, extra-curricular activities in secondary education. Seven of ten adult interviewees (two NCV lecturers, two NSC teachers and the district and national level DBE staff members), when asked to select cards said, “all of them.”

Table 24: Results of learning card sort

Types of Learning	NCV Learners	NSC Learners
Different subjects or occupational areas	8/9	5/14
Skills to get a job	7/9	2/14
About community and other learners	5/9	6/14
Thinking skills, how to solve problems	7/9	7/14
Social skills	1/9	2/14
About yourself	1/9	12/14
Values	1/9	5/14
To take initiative	1/9	2/14
Through extracurricular activities	0/9	1/14

NSC learners overwhelmingly prioritized the importance of “learning about yourself” (12/14), followed by “learning thinking skills, how to solve problems” (7/12), “learning about community and other learners” (6/12), “learning values” (5/12) and “learning in different subjects and occupational areas (5/12). Learners said things like, “you have to learn about yourself...to know your individuality,” (SS Learner 5) and spoke to self-knowledge in a variety of ways, including knowing your strengths and weaknesses (6 of 14 learners) and about how self-knowledge can help one make decisions about the future and career path. Eight (of fourteen) learners discussed the different types of learning in ways that suggested learners saw them as interconnected. Learning values was often discussed in relationship with self-knowledge and values. One student notes that “being a person with values helps you to build up your life like the reality: you will know who you are” (SS Learner 2). Problem solving was expressed by four learners as being able to solve your own problems, however many learners appeared to consider “problem solving” as a skill which was largely related to solving problems in math or science. Some learners (4/14) spoke of learning to take care of others (as in the

health professions) and three spoke to solving conflict. The quotes below demonstrate the interconnectedness learners saw between different types of learning.

Learning about yourself...for you to succeed in life you have to know what you want and that goes with values because if I don't respect others that means I won't be able to succeed because sometimes I will need [name] to help me with something. So if I don't respect her that means that I won't get that help that she has for me. And then learning thinking skills: If I can't solve my own problems that means I can't face the outside world, I can't interact with people, I can't talk to them nicely and that will cause me not to succeed in life...Yes. And I think learning about community and other learners...if my relationship with [name] is not okay, that means we won't get along and sometimes she has that help that I will need in future for me to succeed so if we don't have a good relationship that means I won't go anywhere. (SS Learner 1)

Learning about yourself, you have to know about yourself to know what you like, what things you don't like. What kind of person you are. What are your abilities? All these things. ... learning skills to get a job. Like if I know myself I will know what kind of job I want. Like if I know myself I wouldn't choose a career where I'm not comfortable in that particular job. (SS Learner 13)

Learning about yourself - immediately once you know about yourself it's easy to understand other people and [you] can communicate with them and understand each other's beliefs and values. Learning thinking skills and how to solve problems. As I said once you know about yourself you can understand others. You can solve social differences. When I say social problems I'm talking about problems in the society. (SS Learner 14)

Still seething from a heated critique of "exam pressure" and biology, on learner says,

It would be so nice if you could just learn about yourself and the community and others. NOT basically everything around you, how trees grow, you know stuff like that requires a curious learner. You know when you are curious you want to know how everything works. ...some of us don't wanna learn how things work we just wanna know ourselves, our community like [name of township], the history of [name of township] like people around here. I know them. They love getting involved in sport. Yah things like that and learning about other learners at school. [name of other learner] is very strict, she is kind, she is fun, and I mean there is a lot to think about, you don't have to crack your head. Learning by seeing stuff is a lot easier than reading. I'm not against reading, I also love books. ...Anything from short stories, plays, everything. (SS Learner 10)

One of the secondary school teacher talks about how experiences and exposure to new things at school can help learners learn about themselves.

Some here as school they will realize who they are by seeing their potential. They would say I didn't realize I was this. ...I have seen that some of the students actually start to know their abilities, their strengths. ...They write a maths test and you find 'oh I'm the highest', you write a physical science test and you ... now they see this is my potential, this is my area. Now you see that type of student liking that subject because now you have learnt something new about yourself, something that you didn't understand. Those schools that are doing extracurricular activities there is sporting activities as well. You find some students discover that "oh I'm good in rugby, I'm good in netball." So that also gives them something to hold on to that they may... it's got something to do with their future. (SS Teacher 2)

Other responses spoke to issues of community, social skills, and talking initiative. One learner identified "learning to be a good parent" as an important priority. Two quotes speak to some of these issues.

In future one has to be a good parent. There are some parents that are abusing children... Their children suffer and they do not motivate them or give them what they want. That love that a child needs from his or her mother. Being a good parent will motivate your child to get where you are. ... Here I'm picking learning about community and other learners. ... You are a resident in your community and then you have to know what is happening around you. You have to learn what is around you to ... you might even help by giving some people things that they do not have or sharing what you know with them. To know about people around you. You have to know people, hang around; there are many things that you can talk about like what we can do to change our lives and what we can do to improve the community out there. (SS Learner 5)

If I can't socialize with other people then it means I can't survive. To me life is all about surviving, about making it. It's all about being there and being able to communicate with other people. Social skills are therefore key. Because if I want something from you we have got to socialize, we've got to talk as human beings, communication and then learning to take initiative. In learning to take initiative I would like to do something, if I see that out there people are littering I should make the effort of picking up the papers and cleaning. People will not even have the guts to [not] litter so taking initiative of not littering: it begins with me. People will see it from me and think maybe that we should not litter. They will take it from me. It's about leading, taking initiative. (SS Learner 12)

Most NSC learners speak of learning as a social process, where knowledge is inter-related, situated in a particular context, embedded in an awareness of self and expression of values such as respect, caring, communication and nurturing positive relationships. Interviewees' responses to "learning about values" are discussed further in the following chapter.

The FET College

All NCV learners are enrolled in an occupational area, each associated with certain types of jobs. Learners enroll in seven courses a semester: three foundational courses and four occupational area courses. Nearly all NCV students expressed their appreciation of “practical” as opposed to “theory-only” learning and students were most enthusiastic when talking about their practical work, being exposed to new things (e.g., equipment and activities) and discovering their talents.

The practical, or “I love contact center”

When asked about the purpose of the NCV, seven of nine NCV learners emphasized the importance of “practical” experience they received in an occupational area and juxtaposed it with the “theory only” learning they had in secondary school. Many learners spoke with pride about what they were learning. The below quotes highlight the importance NCV students see in the “practical” training they receive as a part of the NCV program.

A student who has done grade 12 [is the NSC, academic secondary school] and NCV, [I can say] they are too different. One who has done NCV... he can explain things... We have got skills somewhere, somehow than the one who has been in grade 12 ...So that's why I'm saying there is a huge difference between them. The qualification is the same but there is a huge difference between them 'cause you take an NCV student, you talk of a parallel series, already its making sense. You know [what] a parallel series is. You go to circuit board, there is things that you point out there that this is this; the function of this is this. We talk of capacity in grade 12 but you don't know capacity, they talk of an invertor, you can't point, you talk of a resistor, you talk of transformer, you talk of AC motors, DC motors and what about the NCV student? He will point and explain the function of this thing is this this, for this thing to function onto this manner this and this is, you know. (FETC Student 3)⁷⁷

I love contact center [call center training]. It is about answering calls, putting people on hold, customer service, about the equipment that we need to use in a call center. It is like office admin. I think maybe I'd like that course. (FETC Student 6)

Interviewer: Maybe you can give me an example of the practical that you like.

⁷⁷ During the conversation, we're writing diagrams of circuits and talking about them.

Interviewee: Like the practical for admin where we go to the admin room. That's where we get to experience office work. We get our telephones there, photocopying machine, also like a reception we do a role play there

Interviewer: And you like that?

Interviewee: Yes I like that. Even today we are going there in the afternoon. (FETC Student 8)

And when you get here [the FET College] you know that you can have a matric certificate of some value. ...because it has a lot of practicals...which they want at work...so here it's a bit of a bonus, because in high school you only get the theory. Here we get to go to workshops. (FETC Student 2)

The FET offers the practical. You have practical time. There is a full day for ... you just go to the workshop. ... where I started Level 2 ...the policy was if a student is doing civil engineering ... they must also do roof work practical ...At Level 2 practical they were doing small trusses and they will explain to you how this works and how does this fit. And there is this other subject, Planning where we do the calculations. They teach you how to calculate a structure from scratch. They give you the plan and say calculate a structure, you calculate it, you start calculating the bricks then you calculate how many bricks should be there and you calculate the trusses. Then you are done and you give the lecturer. That was an assignment that I did in Level 2 Planning...there is a house there with the L-roof, [points to a structure in the distance] and we did the roofing. The roof. ...it's still there you can check.....I saw it yesterday, it was still there. And then we did... (FETC Student 4)

Learners' enthusiasm for, and often pride in, their practical work is evident – one learner can point to a truss he helped build, another can point to a circuit with a parallel series that he has built (and he knows that he can explain it inside and out), another can role play working in a professional office environment, perhaps thinking about a future job or state of being. The practical knowledge has an application focus which many learners value.

One learner talks about learning the Pythagorean Theorem in a new way and in a way linked to his practical work. He notes,

When we are going to the workshop especially last year, we had to build a foundation. I think three or four courses of the wall. Now in setting out the courses of the foundation, different angles to use like setting out the angles and the lines. And also there they have a way of teaching. They call their method the 3-4-5 Method. They measure 3 levels this side and 4 this side. From here to there its 5. That one there it appears in maths [in secondary school]. The Pythagoras theorem does this and this ... [here] you learn to do things in a new way so you

actually learn to do things in a different way than it used to be solved. (FETC Student 2)

The FET College students give many reasons for valuing practical instruction. They indicate that practical, activity-based learning, with real materials and experiences makes learning more enjoyable and helps them better retain information. They see practical training as highly relevant to their career aspirations and what they perceive to be the interests of potential employers. Some students express finding intrinsic enjoyment in building a truss, writing software, or role playing office admin scenarios. FET College students find meaningful learning in the “practical.” Many of FET College learners contrast this with their experience in secondary school.

FET College learners critique secondary school

Nearly half of secondary school learners in South Africa drop out between grades 10-12. Some of them later enroll in the NCV. Many learners enrolled in the NCV course at the FET College have a history of academic failure and dropout. Seven of nine NCV learners I interviewed dropped-out of secondary school and saw themselves as “not that smart or intelligent” (FETC Student 2). For many FET College learners I interviewed, secondary school was a place of multiple failures (e.g., taking grade 11 twice), poor academic preparation, teacher-centered pedagogy, theory-based teaching (e.g., chalk, talk and blackboards), a disempowering school environment and, finally, a learning environment not attuned to their interests. For the majority of learners, English, the language of schooling, is not their home language. Some learners speak to their experience in secondary school as diminishing their self-confidence. One student notes, “you know for some people going to high school and getting good marks so that you could get a bursary to university it’s a challenge. Because some people are not that smart or that intelligent” (FETC Student 2). Other students speak to their many failures and subsequent success as demonstrating their perseverance. One student shares his experience.

To be honest I’m not an intelligent student. I’m a hard working student... now here comes to secondary, I needed to pass secondary. ‘Cause the first year I don’t remember, my father passed away, I don’t know what’s happened there. But I had this thing in my head that I’m going to pass. Here comes the second year; we worked hard, we worked hard, we did pass, but my matric [NSC score] wasn’t

that charming and when I came to college I had this fear that, '[says his name] what are you going to do?'

I told myself that I'm gonna learn harder. I never in my life got a distinction but in here I did get it in Level 2. So I had something that, you know about me that if I need to pass then I just have to study hard. Harder than anything, I study hard, I study hard. Then I learn something about myself that I had this mind. You know the distinction doesn't belong to my family, doesn't belong to my blood, but you know I got it!" (FETC Student 3)

FETC lecturers are quite critical of secondary school: they see it as a place which pushes struggling learners out; that doesn't create space for learners to express themselves; that provides poor academic preparation; and that focuses on a particular type of learning (memorize and repeat) which results in creating students who have low self-confidence and who struggle to express themselves. One lecturer notes,

We get so many grade 11 learners coming here and wanting to enroll...and we have to ask, why not complete grade 12??? They will cry. They studied for the grade 11 three times. They don't want to go back there. Even when you look at their reports there are circles, red marks showing that they did not pass this and this. (FETC Lecturer 3)

The lecturer continues, "the challenge is the kind of students we normally get - those declared not to be competent at the school level. ...Many of them come from grade ten, eleven. They see us as their last chance. If we don't give them a chance... because the level of their mentality is that they cannot achieve" (FETC Lecturer 3). Sometimes the negative experience of secondary school is reinforced at the FET College. In the below exchange, one learner critiques the narrow curriculum offered at most township schools.

Interviewer: Some high schools also provide opportunities for trades, for music, for drama so it's not just about first home language, first additional language, English, maths, science. Because most students they just do that.

Interviewee: And some of them they hate it.

Interviewer: They do?

Interviewee: You find that he is not in love with the subject but he is forced to do that.

Interviewer: If they had opportunities to then do a trade...

Interviewee: They will do a trade instead of doing the class. (FETC Student 4)

One NSC student echoes this concern noting that at secondary school, "we just do theory and theory. You just read out of the books. We don't do practicals. I also wanted to go

to an FET college it's just that my parents do not have money and stuff" (SS Learner 10).

One learner asks,

Why doesn't the government take this thing [the NCV] and put it at secondary level you know because it will be much easier? I could say because it will be the best for this country because they put it here, it's costing us time. It's costing us time because look, I finished my matric [NSC] in 2009 and then I came here, I started something, I'm not saying NCV is bad, its good, ... but it cost me time. (FETC Student 3)

FET College learners' and lecturers' perspectives on the importance of, and their interest in, practical learning, as well as their critiques of secondary school generally align with the critiques of secondary school learners and teachers.

The varied interests of learners

NCV learners identified four main areas of learning most important to them: learning in different subjects or occupational area, learning skills to get a job, learning thinking skills, how to solve problems and learning about the community and other learners. While these were the cards selected, in other conversation, several learners talked about self-knowledge and identified learning as a social activity. Nearly all learners expressed an interest in learning to use computers and having access to the internet. Several learners in secondary school and the FET College expressed difficulties in learning and expressing themselves in English and many FET learners noted their long-standing struggle with math (see Table 25).

Table 25: Results of learning card sort

Types of Learning	Learners
Different subjects or occupational areas	8/9
Skills to get a job	7/9
Thinking skills, how to solve problems	7/9
About community and other learners	5/9
Social skills	1/9
About yourself	1/9
Values	1/9
To take initiative	1/9
Through extracurricular activities	0/9

For some learners, their interests in their occupational areas and job skills appear straightforward. One notes, “so far I like Concrete [a course] the most, because I can relate to it. You look at houses and roads...concrete is everywhere. So yeah...it makes it a bit easier and more fun” (FETC Learner 2). Another chooses, “learning skills to get a job” and states, “I know that if I get my qualifications, I know which jobs I’m gonna qualify for” (FETC Student 5). The student then speaks to the varied skills that can be used in the occupational area.

Interviewee: Okay like I said public relations skills, it has to do with the PR things. I would say the skill that you need to know, how to manage yourself, your diary. Knowing the computer skills too because it’s very much important, you are gonna work with computers and time management too. You have to know how to manage your time.

Interviewer: ...are you learning those things here?

Interviewee: Ya, we are learning them.

Interviewer: Really, can you give an example?

Interviewee: Time management we learn it at office practice. They teach us how to manage your time, how to diarize, you have to know how to diarize. You can’t say I wanna be a management assistant but you don’t even know how to diarize. You have to know how to diarize, how to manage your time. (FETC Student 5)

Another learner spoke in terms of the inter-relationships between different subjects and how they related to their occupational field. One civil engineering learner states that he will learn new topics at the same time as starting his construction business, but that at the FET College, he will learn financial maths and supervision (FETC Student 4).

Several students talk about how learning is a social process and speak of the interrelationship between social learning, working with others and communication. One learner notes, “I think the most important is social learning. Because everywhere you go you gotta work with people so you gotta be good at working with people....you can’t get anything done without working with people” (FETC Student2). Nearly all learners expressed the importance of using computers or internet, but lament the limited internet access at the FET College campus. In the words of one student, “We have labs, but they’re not many and not open often and don’t have internet. If someone is using the

computer you may have to come back when it's inconvenient for you" (FETC Student 1). Many students choosing "thinking skills" speak of its importance in terms of "you must learn to solve your own problems" (FETC Student 1). A few learners speak to the importance of creativity, one notes, "in programming class, sometime the assignment includes a long code. Sometimes you can change the coding so that it's different, shorter" (FETC Student 6).

While "work experience" and "work integrated learning" are supposed to be critical features of the NCV program, only three of nine learners identified it as playing a role in their program. One learner indicated that it wasn't that useful because, "we learn too much here at school" (FETC Student 8). Another learner spoke at length her work placement.

Last month March, they took us to the practicals at the hospital, ne, we were doing filing there. I have experience how to open the files for the patient at the first visit. ...When we are filing the files, we are not just filing with the names; we are filing with the file numbers. They come in, we collect their pills, we take their cards. They fill out a form. Then we take the file back. ...When a patient comes to the hospital for the first time we ask for the ID book, there are three categories to pay at the hospitals...H1 ...no money, H2, they have some money and pay R60 and H3, they have a bigger monthly income [she uses exact figures] and pay R108. (FETC Learner 9)

In offering an example of problem-solving, the learner notes:

In the hospital, when you are collecting the card for the patient, sometimes you will not be able to find their file. The patient becomes angry, thinks that the file is lost. You have to see where the file might be. You go to the pharmacy, you go to HR...and then somewhere you find the file. The file is not where the other files are ...but you can find it and bring back the file. (FETC Learner 9)

This learner is an older student, aged 40, and appears focused attaining the qualification to help her access jobs. Towards the end of the interview, the student notes, "if you are done [with the qualification] you must go to the company to get a job. That's life" (FETC Student 9).

Learners' responses make it clear that they are focused on gaining employment and that they are aware that being prepared to be successful in different occupations may require not only different types of occupational knowledge, but also cognitive and non-cognitive skills. What also appears to be clear from the responses of most learners is that

their choice of occupation is not based on market-demand, job vacancies or projected job growth in occupational areas. Rather, most learners appear to have gravitated to a particular occupational area because they find it interesting: perhaps they like computer programming, ensuring that a business office is organized and well-run, or simply working with concrete.

One of the main differences between NSC learners and NCV learners interviewed is that NCV learners appear to be much more focused on getting a job. There may be several reasons for this: the NCV learners are older and they have more adult responsibilities, NCV learners, having experiences with academic failure as well as difficulty with finding work, may focus more intensively on the importance of a specific qualification in terms of getting a decent job. These differences suggest that learner-defined purposes of education change with age as well as with the agency of learners. For example, a seventeen-year old secondary school learner may be more interested in “learning about yourself” and in exploring a variety of areas of knowledge and skills, in part because the financial and social pressure of impending adult-hood are not nearly as urgent. If this is the case, then this suggests that there is more space in secondary school to support holistic development. This space suggests a broader role for teachers as well to inhabit roles as mentors and guides in learners’ development of self-knowledge. As learners age, they may be more likely to focus on “getting a job” since “that’s life” (FETC Student 9).

English

South Africa has eleven official languages, however, proficiency in English and Afrikaans have historically offered secondary school students the best access to higher education and to well-respected and remunerated professions and careers. While this research did not set out to interrogate what South African scholars identify as “the Language Problem,” learners, teachers, and lecturers spoke to the complexity of teaching and learning in a multi-lingual environment in which not all languages were valued equally. The Home Language at the secondary school is Sotho, the home language of the majority of learners, and most learners take English as their First Additional Language. A large number of learners have a complicated background and relationship with language. One NSC learner states her dilemma thusly,

I used to attend a Model C school and then I came here. I had to come here so I had to change the languages. I used to study English and Afrikaans and then when I came here I had to study Sesotho and English, and English as my second language. Whereas where I was schooling, English was my first language. So that was a big change for me but now I'm used to it. ...[In the Model C school] we used to have white teachers only and everything was spoken in English and Afrikaans regardless of whether you understand the language or not. If you were going to attend there, it's the only language you use and you are not supposed to speak any other language even your home language. It wasn't allowed. ... [Sotho] was my home language it's just that my parents decided to take me to a school, they thought the education there was better. (SS Learner 10)

One interviewee inadvertently speaks to the complexity of the education and language issue, as well as to the hegemony of non-black South African languages, by identifying a dual medium, English-Afrikaans school as, "in a true sense a multi-cultural school." She continues, "we had [teaching] both in English [and] Afrikaans; coloured children, white children, black children that came from various backgrounds; some of them [from] town and townships and some of them informal settlements, squatter camps" (Policy 2).

Sotho and Zulu is the home language of most learners at the secondary school research site. One exchange with teachers speaks directly to the challenges learners have with English.

You find other teachers teaching with the native language, but then sometime they [the students] don't understand [the English needed for the exams]. It's getting frustrating really. It's becoming really difficult. They [students] use [grammar] rules of Sotho to explain English.

I was talking about exams [in Business Studies]. You know, they [students] may know the answer to the question. They know the answer, but they cannot interpret the question [because it is in English].

I suggested they watch cartoons. They [cartoons] have a very high level of English, like SpongeBob SquarePants. The English they [the students] are using is WhatsApp English and SMS English. I even called in previous learners who did this [watched cartoons], and the students listened and asked questions, but they never really applied it. It becomes a problem for me to teach after a while.

You know I grew up speaking English at home so I speak Home Language English. But I have had to adjust the way I speak to accommodate my learners. I "Sotho-ized" it. I am busy "Sotho-fying" my English so my learners can understand me. But now I am also disadvantaging them. Because it now means that they are not learning English at a higher level. I feel like I shouldn't be teaching. (SS Teacher 3)

Earlier the teacher notes, “you’ll find learners in grade 12 and they can’t even write a sentence. You’ll read them a sentence and they can’t even write it. ...Sorry, we’re just letting off steam” (SS Teacher 4). At another point in the interview, a teacher notes that before secondary schools, “they [learners] have never written an essay in their life [and] sciences classes, [in earlier grades] are not English” (SS Teacher 3). I mention that some learners say that school is boring. The teacher responds, “sure it’s boring...some teachers are boring but it depends on the teacher. Maybe they’re [the students are] finding writing boring. In earlier grades teachers are eager for them [students] to pass. They’re [students] not even taught how to write an essay. They think it’s too serious here: they do models and posters and drawings in earlier grades. Here they’re writing essays on subject topics” (SS Teacher 3). These problems with English certainly contribute to the syllabus coverage challenges expressed by teachers, who note, “In the class you are trying to get learners to understand, but time is just going by and you find out you are behind and then you are trying to push (to cover the rest of the material quickly)” (SS Teacher 4).

To what extent do language issues contribute to failure and dropout, or in the words of one FET College lecturer, prevent secondary school learners from having an “opportunity to express, to explain, to elaborate themselves?” (FETC Lecturer 3). An exchange with two learners speaks to this issue.

Interviewee 2: You just go ‘I’m tired with books’ this is why we have a lot of learners dropping out of school. It’s these kinds of things whereby they don’t understand, they are afraid to go ask for help because other teachers would be like ‘you are so dumb, you still don’t get this?’

Interviewee 1... You did this from Grade 10

Interviewee 2: Then it goes over and over in your mind ‘I’m just so dumb’ then you drop out of school. To be honest all my classmates from grade 8 are not in the same class with me. It was going to be nice if we were all going to Grade 12 like let’s say there were 40 of us in grade 8 now there is only 15, 20.

Interviewer: And what happened to others?

Interviewee 2: They dropped out; some are repeating grades, some they don’t [have] anything to do with school. (SS Learners 9 & 10)

Critiques from Secondary School are echoed by an English teacher at the FET College, who says,

Most people [students] have issues with language. They don't read, they don't cope. they want to express themselves in their native language. I don't know what happened to the foundational phase....Some learners attended the Model C schools. And they are so fluent in [spoken] English, but their writing skills....they have problems with hearing, writing. ...I have a student with terrible writing. It's so frustrating because he's going to fail, thus I'm saying I'm a counselor. I have to tell him you don't have to know English to be successful. (FETC Lecturer 2)

In this chapter, interviewees identify instrumental and existential purposes for education, express the varied interests they have, and identify a desire for holistic development. NSC learners and NCV students also critique the narrow construction of academic secondary education, the excessive emphasis on teacher-centered instruction and exams. NSC teachers speak to the challenge of working in an academic secondary school system which may not be relevant for the majority of enrolled learners. In a similar vein, NCV lecturers speak to the challenge of working in an FET college system and NCV program which struggles to graduate students and place them into jobs. Despite these criticisms and concerns, all participants speak to possibilities for broader conceptualizations of education. The next chapter broadens our understanding of the perspectives voices by teachers and learners by looking at the school environment.

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Chapter 10: The school environment

Introduction

Public schools are located in communities. And, the characteristics of communities are invariably intertwined with the life of the school. Experiences in and perceptions of schooling and education may reflect broader social dynamics in a community: Is the school considered a “good” school? What are the things that are valued in the community? Who is “responsible” for education? What are the issues and challenges in the community? Facing youth? Most learners attend public secondary schools during their adolescence. Their bodies are changing; their relationships with their friends, peers and adults change; their sense of the future, their community, and their place in the world is dynamic, evolving. The school and community environments are social environments; learning is social process. At school, learners and teachers enact answers, often in socially agreed on ways, to questions such as: What is knowledge? What knowledge is important? How do we learn? What is the role of the teacher? Of the learner? At schools, learners interact with other learners from different households and backgrounds, as well as with teachers and lecturers. Peer, mentoring and romantic relationships form; social groups emerge and dissolve; assumptions are challenged, or sometimes reinforced.

In South Africa, all public secondary schools are overseen by the Department for Basic Education. Similar to education ministries the world over, DBE has a headquarters below which are management and administrative offices at provincial and district levels, each of which play a role in influencing what happens at school. Public secondary schools are governed by a Board of Governors (BoG); however the influence of the BoG varies: DBE civil service staff, principals, school administrators, and teachers are the main actors involved in the day to day of schooling and education. All public FET colleges are overseen by the Department for Higher Education and Training. Most FET colleges have several campuses. A legacy of apartheid, current FET colleges are comprised of an agglomeration of several different colleges located in a similar geographic area, but each of which served different student populations (by race and class) during the apartheid era. A FET college campus which served a black South

African population during the apartheid era may not look all that different from a secondary school campus in a township today. Among other things, FET colleges depend on DHET for capital and recurrent resources, staffing and professional development.

I argue that if we seek to properly understand schooling and education, our analysis must take into account the context (the social and institutional environment) in which education takes place. This research seeks to draw on the perspectives of teachers and learners in townships – historically marginalized communities. This chapter presents some of the schooling experiences shared by interviewees and seeks to identify some of the interrelationships between interviewee experiences, their perspectives on the purpose of education, and the relationship of both to dominant discourses on education and skills.

Secondary school environment

Secondary school teachers I interviewed suggested that they work within an education system and school environment which they characterize as broken. There is little sense of community within and beyond the school and lack of discipline pervades the school campus. Faced with unrealistic expectations and no support, teachers feel embattled. A welter of negative influences effect the lives of learners; the flimsy security fence surrounding the school does little to protect the efforts of educators from the problems of the community

Adolescence and the community

According to DBE guidelines, students in grades 10 through 12 should be between ages 16 and 18, the age range of late adolescence. Physically, girls and boys are developing into men and women. In interviews, some NSC learners speak to their former trepidation (excitement and fear) about going to secondary school; they talk about being exposed to new things, “the challenges of life,” and about the pervasive influence of peer groups and peer pressure. Learners crave new experiences but at the same time, many learners I spoke with sought guidance, mentoring and positive relationships with adults. One learner states, “you know when you come to secondary everything changes. The way you feel about yourself changes. The way you look at yourself changes. You are growing up, you are a teenager, and a lot of things are changing. It happens all at once. Especially school stuff. If my parents didn’t want me to come to school I would stay at home” (SS

Learner 10). Another learner notes, “when I was doing Grade 7, when I would think about going to secondary school, I think I would just end here [at primary, and] not to go to secondary school. Everybody would just say, ‘Secondary school. It’s tough.’” The learner expressed her change of heart, noting, “okay I’m going to secondary school, that’s where my life begins” (SS Learner 5). Another learner states,

Secondary like education is where like you see some challenges. I can say it’s a start of your life. Primary, you were just kids but here at secondary when I first came to secondary I saw many students; some are big, some are small. I saw many things that I didn’t think happen to school. ...but here at secondary that’s where you see life. That’s where you see challenges of life. That’s where you see everything that concerns life. ...At primary it’s very rare to see a pregnant learner but here! Most of the learners here are mothers they are no longer children. They have babies. Some do not have one child but two. (SS Learner 13)

Two teachers spoke at length on the negative influences in the community and the impact of these influences on the lives of adolescents. One says,

You know learners in the Gauteng Province are exposed to quite a number of things [taverns, entertainment centers, sporting events] of which the learners in the Free State are not exposed to. So learners in the Free State, slightly they focus more on the academic matters and then this one [learners at this school] they are influenced by so many things outside the school, you see. (SS Teacher 1)

Issues of community are discussed later, but what is notable here is that as adolescents are developing and changing into adults they are also living in an environment of negative community influences, such as exposure to drugs, alcohol, violent service delivery protests and xenophobic attacks as well as exposed to the general challenges of poverty, including lack of electricity, heat in the winter, and food insecurity. Any one of the challenges, and often a combination of them, can sideline efforts by teachers and learners to substantively engage in education. As we consider the challenge of education in the context of the several external issues, we can refer to the mantra of the FET College teacher expressed in the previous chapter, who, before starting to lecture, asks, “are my learners [really] here?” (FETC Lecturer 2)

Dropout and peer pressure

As noted in earlier chapters, dropout between grades 10 and 12 is very high in South Africa. Nearly half of the NSC learners interviewed spoke extensively on issues of dropout. Learners associated secondary school dropout with behaviors like smoking

and drug use, the result of suspension after multiple academic failures (in some cases due to learners not taking school seriously), something which happens after youth return from initiation ceremonies (after which they do not take school seriously), pregnancy, and because some learners need to stay at home to take care of family members (e.g., elder care, child care). One interviewee stated that some learners could drop out because their parents are wealthy, or the learner already had a job waiting. Almost half of learners talked about the high level of pregnancy at school, and the issue was a hot topic of discussion by male and female learners in three different interviews. Nearly half of the learners noted the influence of peer pressure, with several relating it to dropout, saying things like, “peer pressure is killing most of our youth” (SS Learner 1). A few learners identified “older learners” as responsible for most negative behaviors and recommended that older learners be sent to Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Centres, presumably, to pursue their NSC studies at those locations. Several factors relating to dropout are identified in the below two exchanges.

Interviewee 1: Lack of knowledge and skills and peer pressure and most of them... yes peer pressure is the most thing. If I'm with a gang of girls who are smoking, doing things that are not good and are not acceptable in school they are gonna drop out because they do not have ... in class they do not concentrate that's why they end up failing and repeating the same class for many years. That's why they drop out.

Interviewee 2: Ya I agree with [name] like drug abusers and those people who committed crime I think they, they decide to drop out because they think school is nothing. From what I'm reading now there is nothing that I can do so it's better if I drop out and make a living selling fruits and small goods...

Interviewer: Go ahead, keep going...

Interviewee 1: Ya and family problems. Different people come from different families; different back grounds so you may find out that some drop outs have family problems like they have to take care of their mother or somebody who is sick. You will find that a child is living with his grandmother and grandfather and they are both sick and you want to take care of them. It's the only family that you have and you want to take care of them while they are still alive...That's why they decided to drop out of school. (SS Learners 5 & 6)

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Interviewee1: Teenage pregnancy is a very big problem here because there are a lot of sexually active teens so I think our school needs to have lessons to show them how to use contraceptives to avoid teenage pregnancy.

Interviewer: ... Do young men drop out also?

Interviewee 2: They are leaving because of different reasons. There is this person that I know. This person went to an initiation school, when they came back they were the most corrupt person that I knew. Even at school they were expelled too many times.

Interviewer: You say corrupt, how?

Interviewee 2: Disturbing teaching and learning. They were doing things that people wouldn't even feel like okay being beaten will not solve this problem. Or they were saying go take a break and you will come maybe they were saying we will kick you out of school as a punishment and maybe you will be better and come back. But again maybe it's because peer pressure. People tend to drop out because they don't do their work because of friends. They go out some of them fail at school after they come back from the initiation school and they lose concentration in their school work and they don't even do, they don't participate well, until they fail five times. And after that they feel there is no use for them to go to school because they have been doing these things and it's not getting into their heads so what's the use going because we are not learning, so they decide to drop out.

Interviewee 1: Ya I think with most teenage boys it's that part of peer pressure. Most teenage boys they love their friends and their friends will influence them into such things as drugs and smoking, if you are not smoking you are not cool so that makes people feel small. Then they do stupid things only to please their friends only to find out that they are just damaging themselves. So at school they are not only affecting themselves but others.

Interviewee 2: Yes, some of them do not even think of their future. Some people drop out because they know their finances is secure because of their parents then they may feel this is not working out for me. Maybe my father is working out there then maybe I can get a job – nepotism. (SS Learners 11 and 12)

The is widespread concern that many secondary school push poor performing learners out to boost their matric pass rates (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2008) which according to the secondary school principal at the research site is the only thing DBE cares about. An adult interviewee identifies this pressure, stating,

The way that I experience it: currently in Gauteng they are saying year after year in comparison with other provinces of our country 'who is going to be number

one as a province?’ Obviously the competition is high between Gauteng and the Western Cape and recently the Free State has come into the picture to say which of these can be the number one province. Obviously you cannot deny that it is politically inclined... a lot of emphasis has been placed in saying for Gauteng no school can achieve less than 85% (pass rate) for this year that we are in – 2014. And it means that if you are going to perform below this, it means that you will be rated as an underperforming school. (Policy 2)

When I asked two learners what could be done to help address the issue of dropouts they say,

Interviewee 1: Yes like they can create youth programmes. Like they can go to each and every school notifying them about what’s wrong with the drop out. I think they can get the message.

Interviewee 2: Yes if a child is having family problems s/he can talk to a teacher and then a teacher might come up with a solution to talk to social workers. As [name] said get to youth programmes people from Love Life to talk to us about what is really important about our future, why we shouldn’t drop out of school.

Interviewer: So there is space to do something? I’m not sure whether they are doing these programmes now.

Interviewee 2: They aren’t. (SS Learners 5 & 6)

More than 50% of youth entering secondary school leave without obtaining an NSC. Some learners “dropout” for a variety of reasons, other learners, we can suggest, are “pushed out.” After multiple failures influenced by the challenge of learning in a second or third language and the absence of parental support, many learners may determine that secondary school is un-interesting or useless. What greatly frustrates me about this narrative of dropout is that there is nothing in it that suggest that part of the problem is our narrow construction of education and learning in secondary school or that suggests that society should pay greater attention to improving, broadly interpreted, secondary schools in poor and working class communities. These same learners who drop out of secondary school often resurface in an FET college and talk about their love of “contact center” or the joy they take in writing computer programming code. Why do we push so many learners out in the first place?

School safety and security

Six of fourteen learners interviewed highlighted their concerns about school safety and security highlighting the insecure school grounds and the presence of bullying at school. Four learners recommended fixing the fence surrounding the school. Two exchanges speak to this issue:

Interviewee: I would say if she [the Minister of Education] can manage to change the school fence. As you can see our school fence is very poor and anyone is doing... jumping over, doing...

Interviewer: Is it because of security or...

Interviewee: Security problem... It's for security because we are not safe sir. Drug addicts can jump over the fence and steal our bags while we are at school; we are on the streets sir. (SS Learner 7)

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Interviewee 12: We've got too many holes at this school where people can come in and go out as they please and we don't have formal security guards at the gates ... We experienced crime some time ago. One of our classmates they took his stuff.

Interviewee 11: I think he is partially right. I think our school has that feeling that you are not safe and I think there is also that feeling that thieves are not stupid. They can't come to school knowing that there are thousands of learners and take one of them without anyone noticing. I think they come when learners are not there. That's why part of me feels safe and part of me doesn't feel safe.

Interviewee 12: ...I recommend there will be some security staff quickly walking around to check whether there is no drugs, there is no knives; there is no weapons to harm other learners in the process of learning. (SS Learners 11 and 12)

One of the teachers I interviewed spoke at length about a student being stabbed, noting

Last week one of my students was stabbed on his way home. He was robbed of his phone and he got some stitches and the principal called me 'one of your students is not going to write the exam because of this.' And I had to talk to him [the student], is he fine, how is he doing and when he came back everyone was very sympathetic with him, trying to comfort him because they live in a very dangerous society. ...It is also my duty to comfort that child because the next thing you find out that probably he is not coming to school anymore or something will happen to him. (SS Teacher 2)

Other learners spoke of bullying, noting, “to be honest we just talk threats to other children....Threats. When you came to secondary school they are all gonna eat your lunch box. ...I have been threatened that’s why I say when we change the school the old people can go to ABET so that we can all be the same age. Not threatening others” (SS Learner 5). Lancaster (2008) provides extensive evidence on the issue of school-related violence in Gauteng.

No extra-curricular activities

Over half of the students interviewed wanted there to be more extracurricular activities at the school. Most spoke to interests in sports like soccer and netball, but other spoke to interests in quizzes, debates, chess, choir, and field trips. One learner elaborates on the problem.

There is not a lot of activities here at school because the only activity that we have here at school is soccer and netball only. Sometimes when its athletics season we have athletics for that period only and its only like for a month or two. ...I think the people who have the power to implement such things here are not acting. If you can check, if its 2:30pm the teachers go home and they are the people who can facilitate the sports. If the government can get people who could volunteer to coach us because we would really like to play sport. ...even though our yard is not big. There is a sports centre near to where we live. We can go there and do our thing. Different kind of sports. Now the facility is being used for drugs, if people want to take drugs they go to that facility and do drugs there and go home. There is no room for sports. (SS Learner 8)

It is not just sports and extra-curricular activities, learners also express an interest in exposure to new things and to new experiences, as indicated in the below exchange.

Interviewee 2: Going to other places, to explore. You know sitting inside the same yard, the same class every day, is sometimes boring. We are not benefiting because we know if Madame [teacher’s name] teaches us this, we know what she’s going to say, you know. ... Yeah, I think like going places because we always sitting inside [name of school] yard, we not going anywhere unless we pay for going to UJ [University of Johannesburg] to see what’s happening in that university. Unless we pay to go somewhere, you know.

Interviewer: Do they do that sometimes, where you have to pay and you can go somewhere?

Interviewee 2: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh. Where have they gone?

Interviewee 1: We have gone to Cradle of Humankind, Sci-Bono, The World of Beer...

Interviewer: The World of Beer?

Interviewee 1 and 2: Yes. The World of Beer.

Interviewee 1: Last year they went there. It's Gautrain, Hector Peterson Memorial, The African Museum. But I think adding on exploring, I think some learners are not able to go because you have to pay some amount and at home they are struggling [with money]. (SS Learners 1 & 2)

The importance of extracurricular activities is not lost on teachers and other adults. The DBE district staff member notes, "I'm a strong believer of learning through extracurricular activities because for many years I have been a coach [at one of the] secondary schools." She continues, "when I moved to a dual medium school, I not only arranged netball I was also involved in soccer for the boys. And in cultural activities, in terms of singing and dancing. I know what differences this can make to children and even taking children that were problematic. Once you let them learn themselves through extracurricular activities they will be a changed person" (Policy2).

Why is this not happening? Perhaps it is pressure on exams as learners in the below exchange identify.

Interviewer: Ok. Are there any other extra- curricular activities you would want to do?

Interviewee 2: No.

Interviewer: I guess in Grade 12 you're focused in studying?

Interviewee 1 and 2: Yeah. (SS Learners 1 & 2)

One of the secondary school teachers echoes this concern, noting that "in [ex] Model C schools that's where you find some extra-curriculum activities. With townships schools they don't. ...Look at this school, there is no soccer pitch – nothing. No basketball court – nothing. It means that their only thing is education. Learning, that is what they are

mainly concerned about. So that is lacking those extracurricular [activities]” (SS Teacher 2).

An adult interviewee working at the district speaks to the need for more committed teachers. She speaks at length of the differences between ex-Model C schools and township schools.

Just the way that schooling and extra mural activities is being conducted in town schools compared to township schools... Obviously most educators, I’m saying most educators, that is in the township area, they do not put as much effort as teachers in ex-model C schools. And when I speak of ex-model C schools you should understand most of these model C schools that we have in [name of town], there is actually, the teacher component is not only white teachers. In two of those schools it’s a combination of black, coloured, white and Indian teachers but the level of commitment and the work that they put into the lives of children I would say it’s in the correct dimension in terms of taking children a step further [than teachers in township schools]. [but] that’s a conversation for another day! *Laughs.* (Policy 2)

Two teachers at the secondary school express serious concern about the lack of extra-curricular activities. One suggests that the challenge is with the school management and culture, that “the school is big and the principle is very tired” and that “we [the teachers] have a resistance culture.” His recommendation for changing the school is planning, “we’d have committees: A soccer and netball committee, an athletics committee, a debate and cultural committee. We’d have three, four teachers who are responsible and, ...and they’d submit a plan. We’d do a SWOT analysis” (SS Teacher 1).

Support for and valuing of extra-curricular student activities is not a foreign concept in South Africa. Many of South Africa’s quintile 5 (wealthiest) secondary schools offer sport, academic, cultural and other extracurricular activities. At a local mall, I found examples of student artwork from a Quintile 5 secondary school. Art is not a subject which is offered at the secondary school where I conducted interviews.

Teaching, or passion is the road to a broken spirit

Embattled teachers. Teachers in the secondary school seemed embattled. They identified many challenges: poor foundational education and unprepared learners, insufficient management support and resources, the absence of parental involvement and community support in the life of the school and the lives of learners and a constantly

changing and overly complex curriculum. At the end of the day they felt like they were blamed for the failures of learners. The four teachers I interviewed acknowledged that there were many “inexperienced,” “incompetent,” or “unqualified” educators at the school. One notes, “I’m not saying everyone, but you find we still do have a lot of educators who are incompetent. You hire someone who is incompetent to take charge you... the whole group of students will fail” (SS Teacher 2). The teachers I spoke with were probably above average in terms of commitment to their profession – they had agreed to speak with me after school hours and spoke with me freely and at length. Learners shared some of the same concerns as educators: that some teachers were lacking in subject-matter knowledge or pedagogical skill, that some teachers had lost their passion. One interviewee spoke to some of the issues which made them feel overwhelmed.

We need maybe more strong teachers, teachers who have heart, in earlier grades. Let me give you an example of the type of learner we have, in term two: out of 40 learners in grade 10 economics, we have two who passed. Two out of 40! It is not because I don’t teach them. But they’ve been pushed up to grade 10. They’ve been passed up without learning things. You know it takes too much paperwork, too much administration to fail a learner.

Here they are struggling, ...and in the end it’s like the teacher is not doing enough. Your learners fail and they [the administration] ask you ‘what are the problems? What are your strategies?’ And being a young teacher...I feel like I should change careers. I am trying and trying but now it feel like I’m going in circles. I always wanted to be a teacher, but now....

[later on] We have so many [learners] who don’t pass, so it must be the fault of the teacher. Now they’re in grade 10, they don’t pass, so it must be the fault of the teacher. They go to grade 11 and they don’t pass so it must be the fault of the teacher. And they are sent to grade 12. So it must be a problem, these learners failing. And you, as the grade 12 teacher, are expected to do miracles.

There are some good teachers at this school. I have this job. I love it and I had so many hopes and dreams of changing lives. But you know as time goes by, it can break a person’s spirit. This year because of the “situation”, I just let things slide.⁷⁸ Sometimes it really demotivates us. The teacher doesn’t count at all, or the teacher comes in third: after the learner and the parent. (SS Teacher 3)

⁷⁸ It’s not clear what “the situation” is.

All four teachers I interviewed identified with the sentiments expressed above: high and unfair expectations, lack of support, blame for student failure, and a sense of near defeat. It may be that teachers expressing such sentiments are in the minority; however the environmental issues (e.g., community context), systemic challenges (e.g., limited resources, poor foundational education of learners) and management problems (which were unclear, but clearly weighing on teachers) seemed real enough. At the conclusion of one interview, when talking about issues at the school, one teacher said,

Yah, it's depressing. It's not only challenging, but it's depressing. You become very sad when you have to do something and then there is no electricity. Then sometimes there is no water and then it's like somebody is not doing his job correctly. But unfortunately, there is no one you can blame actually, yeah there is no one to blame. Yeah. Because, it's annoying, it's annoying because at home, you plan and then you want to come and do this and that only to find you can't do that because there is no water. You cannot do the experiment, you cannot do maybe...you cannot even make a copy because there is no electricity, you see, and the school doesn't have funds. (SS Teacher 1)

Counseling, career guidance, thinking about the future. Several learners and teachers spoke to the importance of providing learners' guidance and counseling on academic, career, motivational, and personal issues. Four NSC learners explicitly identified the teacher-student relationship as important (e.g., they felt comfortable talking to teachers about learning issues and challenges at home) and called out for more counseling, guidance counseling and mentoring. Several learners spoke to the possibilities for counseling and guidance through the Life Orientation class. One learner notes, "if you are with your teacher you can talk [more] openly than when you are with your parents. Imagine telling your parents that you have a girlfriend; it's a bit awkward that you have a girlfriend...but Life Orientation does have a part where we talk about having girlfriends, substance abuse, peer pressure and such, so you are forced to be open about such things" (SS Learner 8). When I asked one teacher what keep her going she offered the following story. "Sometimes we have to be parents, counselors, social workers. Sometime I might spend the whole day motivating them. I have one student at university now and he is facing very challenging circumstances. But I talk to him and he remembers how I motivated him. It may be just one thing I said, but it can keep him

going” (SS Teacher 3). Another teacher speaks at great length on the role of the teacher as a parent, a counselor, a mentor, and a motivator.

The social problems. You are now presenting the parents here. You are also the father figure or the mother figure. You have the social problem; some of them have problems at home. Some of them are being abused, some of them... the character that they have here is not something that started here so now you try and give them ... bring them together with other students so that they enjoy coming to school. Do you understand? So that they can see the school as the only place where there is hope, the only place where there is life other than being in the streets there.

Just talk socially to them on break time so that they will feel free and they will come to you to tell you that they have problems. If they see that this guy is open they will come to you, they will talk to you.

Some of them they don't even dream about going to university, not that they don't want to go to university but because they don't know anything about university. They don't have the knowledge about university but once you come to them as an educator and say I have been there, don't be fooled by people saying when you finished your secondary education, university is very expensive. If you are going to pass I will give you the application forms, I will go with you there.

When they look at us as educators they also aspire to have that life to say I also want to be a teacher, you are driving a car. So they also want that life. You say this is the route that I took. For you to be where I am, I was also sitting on that desk. You say a few years, some 10 years ago this is what I did to get there so you give them, you motivate them and give them the reasons why they should learn because they know that, okay once if I learn I can do it, I can be like that person. You have motivated them; give them something, some hope to hold on to say I want to do this. (SS Teacher 2)

Several learners and teachers mentioned the lack of systemic career or academic guidance, motivation and mentors (SS Teacher 2, SS Teacher 3). Most of the students I spoke with appeared to be on their own in terms of learning about the university application process: applying to university, learning about bursary and other education finance options and learning about other university entrance requirements, such as taking the National Benchmark Test. An administrator notes, “every year I’m shocked about how many grade 12s go to the preliminary examination and they have not gone to any university or technical institution or even gone to any big business in the area to say can I

start an apprenticeship or what can I do with my life?” (Policy 2) Regarding mentors, one learner notes,

I think right now people are lacking people to look up to. We don't have people to look up to. ...We get people who want to be doctors but we don't have closest family members who are doctors or people around them who are doctors. So they are like I wanna be a doctor but you don't even know a doctor, you only know a doctor when you go and visit them but you don't know [one from] a one-on-one chat. So it's too bad for a person to go to that path because...a doctor would know the challenges that they have gone through and then they will say look out for those points so that you do not go to the same. (SS Learner 12)

Similar issues of counseling and academic and career guidance are raised by FET College students and teachers: lack of clarity on options for further study; on the pros, cons and financial implications of available education options, and of the perception of future employers of different certifications, diplomas and degrees. Whose responsibility is it to think about the future of individual learners?

Curriculum, teacher knowledge and pedagogy. There is a wealth of academic and policy critique and reflection on the last twenty years of curriculum reform in South Africa. Three of four teachers were critical of the apparently on-going nature of curriculum reform. One notes, that the “curriculum keeps changing with the minister. Teachers are confused” (SS Teacher 2) and argues instead that teacher just focus on doing the simple things right. Another teacher notes, “our work schedule (for English) is complicated. This week it's language, next week it's books, and the next week it's passive voice. This week we're here, next week we're there” (SS Teacher 4). Having looked at the curriculum schedule myself, I thoroughly agree with the teachers. Teachers followed a six day rotating schedule. So if I taught Grade 11 Life Sciences in sixth period on Tuesday of this week, according to the schedule, the same slot would come up again the following Wednesday.⁷⁹ Of the curriculum changes, one student notes, “sometimes it can be hard for a teacher to explain something to us because of this curriculum changing. [it's as] it's us both learning and not even having the information ...even if that person has got teaching skills, the person does not have information” (SS Learner 12). The same learner continues with a recommendation:

⁷⁹ In the six day schedule, Grade 11 learners may have five periods of Biology, all following the six-day schedule.

We should not do any more change like the curriculum ones. I say we stick with CAPS [the current curriculum]. It's like we are being turned into lab rats. Everything that you think is harmful you go and inject it on the rat and if the rat reacts badly to it you don't pass it. So it's like they [DBE] were like, 'let's see if CAPS will work'. It's our future here! ...it's like okay, it does not work, let's try something else. It's like some people are doing all those experiments with us. This is our future and we are being used, so to say, as lab rats and can we just stop, can we just continue with this CAPS. You cannot just expect change in a twinkle of an eye. Maybe it will take a decade for its fruits to be seen. So all this changing, it's confusing us, our teachers, so basically it's confusing everybody. (SS Student 12)

The previous chapter shared critiques of banking education. This section on the role of the teacher does not presume to speak to the complexity of the teaching and learning process. The reason I included it is because both teachers and learners speak to issues of "the many role(s) of teachers," "the challenges teachers face," and the issues of curriculum, pedagogy and teacher subject matter knowledge. While human capital and skills discourses may identify the importance of teachers, the generally don't speak to the complexity of the teaching and learning process, and appear instead to believe that neo-managerial and accountability-focused approaches will support the development of learners' higher-level cognitive skills.

One teacher I interviewed offered an example that begins to speak to the complexity of the teaching and learning process involved in developing such skills. He notes,

In most cases you'll find that our focus as a school is based on theory [rather] than the application of the learning content. ... you know that OBE learner-centered approach to learning, it was so important. All the activities, learning, they say learning is 100% the responsibility of the learner...the teacher must create an opportunity in class for the learner to experience the learning content.

Let's say for example, you're teaching Animal Farm.It's a learning content. Then you offer the learners an experience to get inside the learning content and experience it. So they must gain by working with the learning content so that's what we say it's a learner centered approach. Activities, the teacher is just giving direction to activities but the learners must do, they must do! Even if they practice...they dramatize, each and every one must take a role inside the story. You must use that teaching method...the teaching method must allow them to get inside and do something about it, you see. And then that is how we learn. (SS Teacher 2)

Resources, parents, community, discipline

Interviewees speak to a number of other issues which negatively impact the school environment: the dilapidated infrastructure and insufficient resources, the lack of learner discipline, the lack of community at the school and the absence of parental involvement. The physical learning environment at both schools, excepting some areas reserved for FET staff and lecturers, shows evidence of generally poor or negligent upkeep. Litter is omnipresent, chalkboards and desks are in disrepair, doors are marked with chalk, and school grounds show limited upkeep. At the secondary school, the security fence is flimsy razor wire. Sanitation facilities for students are not in good condition and there is very limited evidence of efforts to beautify the campus or to create a welcoming space on the campus or in the classroom. I do not presume to know who is responsible for the deteriorated and unwelcoming physical learning environment. Does the school have sufficient resources or personnel for school upkeep? Does the school management not identify this as a priority? Are learners implicated in contributing to the deterioration of the learning environment?

For unexplained reasons, during the time I was conducting interviews, the secondary school had no electricity for three months. Learners speak to the influence of the lack of electricity as hampering learning: no photocopier, no computers, and lighting issues. One learner notes, “we have a computer center but if there is no electricity that means we can’t use the computers. Sometimes we want to come to school studying the whole night but...there is no electricity so that means we can’t...we won’t be able to see anything” (SS Learner 1). Another learner notes, “What I think about [name of school]? [Name of school] is a secondary school where everyone is accepted that comes as a learner. It’s a good school, it’s just that ... it’s just that we are poor. Our school is poor. Other classes, they don’t have windows or doors, we have shortage of text books. It’s poor. But anyway it’s good; it offers us a good education” (SS learner 13). The previous chapter detailed the extent to which lack of resources limits opportunities for practical learning in science. One learner notes, “If we have to use onion, we use potatoes. We will buy it from our own pocket. Our teacher will tell us, ‘You. You contribute one rand per person so that you will have to do the practical.’ So sometimes it’s not cool. Doing

something from the book so that you have to learn it properly. Just reading it out of the book sometimes you don't get it. You will never get it" (SS Learner 9).

Nearly half of the learners interviewed live with only one or neither of their parents. Several teachers and other adult interviewees lament the lack of parental and community involvement in the school. Secondary school teachers appear to agree that the school community is "not a supportive community" (SS teacher 2). Speaking of the entire district, one interviewee states,

So what I do find here is that the elderly people, the grandparents of these children actually take care of the children while the parents go out and work. So the involvement is bigger for elderly people but it's got its own negative factors that are linked to it. Obviously in the same way that one would say, traditionally many years ago, one would say children will respect their grandparents, it's not like that anymore. They are being raised but you've got no control of those children.

Interviewer: So when you say respect by children you are saying going out and doing whatever they like. The parents may try and discipline them but...

Interviewee: That's exactly. (Policy 2)

At the end of one interview, I ask an adult interviewee, who sits at a national policy level, how she would reimagine secondary school in poor and working class communities. She says,

Parental involvement. It's not only a question of parents in disadvantaged schools but parents in general. ...I mean our parents were not professionals but they knew the importance of education, to make sure that they are there to check their children's books you must be interested in what is happening in your children's lives. ...

For me it can be a game changer if the community is involved, is interested in what is happening in schools. I mean the resources that we put in schools you can see how the schools are vandalized, but how can schools be vandalized within the community, where is the community? During our time schools were a holy cow; we wouldn't come near a school and vandalize a school. Why? Because the community said this is our asset and because schools were used 24/7. After school some community involvement, you are using the facilities of the school and not after two [p.m.] schools close. In fact you can see because those facilities can actually assist in uplifting the community. So its parental involvement and making sure those schools are open after hours so that the community uses the

facilities that are there in the school that can benefit them. In a way they will protect the school. (Policy 3)

Discipline, generally and academic discipline, were identified as issues by all secondary school teachers. In an interview with two teachers, one of them noted,

They [learners] can do anything wrong, there is no discipline. They can do anything and nothing will happen. Just look behind you and see what they're doing. [I look behind me and see students idling outside. It's the afternoon. They're milling about and classes are in session.]

I can tell them to go inside, but then they'll go back out and another teacher will just walk on by. I don't do that anymore. (SS Teacher 3)

This comment is made by the teacher with the broken spirit. Later on the same teacher suggests bringing back corporal punishment, that there is no form of discipline, and that learners seem to enjoy detention. Both teachers argue for improved discipline, stating, "If we discipline them accordingly, they will become who they are [i.e., develop]" (SS Teacher 4). Many of the teachers appeared to identify discipline as a school management problem. One teacher elaborates on the problem of academic discipline, associating the problem with the reduction in corporal punishment and the spread of democracy.

These students when you give them an assignment, something that is good for him or her, we have to fight to get them to do it. You drag them on the coals. What is causing this is, I know we are living in a democratic society, South Africa is one of the most democratic countries in the world where they say a student is not supposed to be beaten up, and you are not supposed to use a stick on a student. You go to explain to the administration, the principal; a student is not doing work, what am I supposed to do? And the principal will say find out other ways of dealing with it. What am I supposed to do if I can't even take a stick and beat him up one or two? Because he is a student I am supposed to treat him like a student. He doesn't know his future and he is still a kid so how do we recommend, I mean I'm not making a recommendation here but I think we really need to deal with this and say to instill academic discipline, how do we instill some academic discipline? We cannot beat these students here but how can we instill academic discipline because once a student has academic discipline you are not going to have any problem. (SS Teacher 2)

The issue of academic discipline is addressed in earlier sections and by SS Teachers 1 and 2. NSC learners, NCV learners and FET College lecturers all agree that academic discipline (studying, turning homework in on time, being prepared for class) is a problem.

This study will not seek to speak to structure-agency interpretations of the issue of academic discipline, though other research (Jansen & Blank, 2014) suggest that changes in school culture and school management can make a big difference in the academic discipline demonstrated at a school.

The FET College environment

A “dumping ground”

The status of FET colleges in the hierarchy of higher education institution in South Africa is low. University education, not FET college education, is the preferred course of study for all secondary school students I interviewed. The structure of the NSC is geared toward placing learners at universities, not at colleges. Notably, the problem of articulation, quantifying the extent to which FET college courses can count for university credit, is one of the highest items on the education reform agenda. As noted earlier, the DHET identifies that the NCV is for “less academically” strong learners. Each of these factors contributes to the low status of FET colleges. Earlier chapters briefly speak to the sociology, the low status, of vocational education. In South Africa, the system of racial capitalism and Bantu Education under apartheid, among other things, created a class of low-wage, low status vocationally-oriented occupations and professions, predominantly employing black South Africans. Wage inequality in South Africa remains high, with large numbers of black and coloured South Africans employed in low skill, low wage jobs.

Learners and educators appeared to agree with the hierarchy of the higher education system (i.e., many learners see the NCV as a stepping stone) and share the perception of FET colleges as “dumping grounds” for academic failures and economically poor learners. The poor resourcing of FET colleges, the insufficiently prepared lecturers and the poor performance of FET colleges in terms of pass rates and throughput reinforce this picture. One lecturer states,

We still struggle to attract students to register for NCV ...because when it was introduced it has this negative stigma. And reason being, it was introduced at FET colleges where FET colleges were considered as what...? Were considered as schools for students who are unable to proceed in normal comprehensive schools

...we used to say they consider us as ‘dumping grounds’ so based on that, that affected the image of NCV which up to now we are still struggling despite the fact that the minister is saying you know what, matriculants who cannot make it through to higher education should consider [the] FETs. Some of them [students] will openly say we are not going there we would rather wait for the second semester at the universities. (FETC Lecturer 1)

Another lecturer notes,

Here in and out we produce dropouts. We only have 2-3 graduates every year. At the end of the day there is no production [graduation]. We produce dropouts. I don’t know if they’re [DHET] flushing money down the drain. For the NATED, we need to have more students, it is best if they put more money into NATED. (FETC Lecturer 3)

This sentiment is echoed by some learners. One learner notes, “You know some people...think if you are in FET you are a stupid...I’ve discovered that a lot...Especially when you are doing NCV they think that you are stupid or something” (FETC Student 5).

All lecturers interviewed indicated that the academic level of admitted students was low. One student notes, “When it comes to subjects, our teachers have a bad attitude. They [sarcastically] say, you are college learners and yet you are taking Maths, English and Science [foundational subjects]. This discourages us. It makes us feel bad and have low self-esteem. You know, we know that, we don’t want to be reminded” (FETC Learner 1). One lecturer sees part of her job as uplifting students, noting that when they arrive at the FET College, “they don’t have self-esteem, they don’t believe in themselves” (FETC Lecturer 3). These perspectives capture the dilemma of the NCV program: the NCV provides a second-chance for secondary school dropouts to continue with their education, but it can contribute to (or reinforce) students’ feelings of academic inferiority.

Data from the FET College bear out the perception of poor performance. DHET focuses on certification (when a student passes 7 of 7 courses in a level) and progression (when a student passes 6 of 7 courses in a level) and is allowed to progress to the next level. At a national level in 2012, 47% and 36% learners entering the levels 2 and 3 respectively did not write exams. For learners who do not dropout and write leaving exams, around 40% pass. If you compare pass rates to learners entered, you find that only 23% and 28% of learners entering levels 2 and 3 respectively passed the level. At the

FET College campus where I completed my interviews, about 30% of learners who enrolled did not take exams. Of the learners who took the end of level exam, the average pass rate, by subject, slightly below 55%. Since a learner needed to pass six of seven subjects to go to the next level, the progression rate at the FET College was much lower.

While I was completing this research I was also working on another project where I had a chance to facilitate a dialogue with learners and lecturers at other FET colleges on DHET policies and FET college experiences. In a dialogue including students and lecturers at a different FET college in Gauteng province, when talking about reform of FET colleges and the establishment of new community colleges, some respondents expressed concern that DHET was planning to warehouse black South Africans into inferior institutions of higher education, similar to apartheid-era Bantu education. The sentiment expressed by several dialogue participants was, “we’ve seen this before.”

A differentiated student population

The population of NCV learners at the FET College includes a mix of learners who dropped-out of high school from grade 9, learners who failed the NSC, and learners who passed the NSC but did not gain entry to university. The majority of NCV learners are youth between the ages of 18 and 24. According to learners and lecturers, the mix of learners, with highly disparate levels of academic preparation and readiness and who demonstrate different levels of maturity, is one of the biggest challenges facing the NCV. In the following exchange, a learner and I discuss this issue.

Interviewee: I don’t think it’s a good idea for them to drop out of school and come to the FET because when they came here they only come here to play. I don’t think they take their school work seriously. Only a few of them, at least those who have failed matric at least, they have an experience of knowing what’s going on out there and they are those who are prepared for the college, not for the grade 10s, 9s and 8s.

Interviewer: So some people who left in grade 8, 9 or 10, maybe they come directly here they are not yet mature?

Interviewee: They are not.

...

Interviewee: The NCV curriculum like I said they have put it wrong there, we only accept learners that come from grade 9. That’s where they get problem students.

Interviewer: They don't maybe have the academic background

Interviewee: Yes. (FETC Learner 8)

Two lecturers echo these sentiments.

[admitting non-matric holders] actually came as a blow especially to our lecturers... I would say students who have passed matric they are more mature than the grade 9s and for us that was not our scope of the type of students [we traditionally worked with]. So it was very difficult for our lectures to deal with that starting with the behavior [compared to those who passed matric]...the standard was high in the curriculum and we were taking the grade 9s so that was evident that the grade 9s could not cope with the level of the curriculum. (FETC Lecturer 1)

We have these grade 9 learners who cannot wait to move on to grade 10. A group that's not here to study [at the FET College]. That's the 10%. They don't want to be in the secondary school – with the rules and the structure [like uniforms]. They are staying at home with nothing else to do, so they come for the NCV. (FETC Lecturer 2)

The lecturer continues, “The real reason they're here, they're not sure of. They don't bring textbooks; they don't do homework (which causes them to miss class) they don't bring their dictionary ...how can you learn a new language without your dictionary? They lack the discipline. [I'm a nice teacher] but I still want results at the end of the day” (FETC Lecturer 2).

What should be done about the mix of learners' academic preparation and the different levels of maturity and academic seriousness of learners? On the academic side, some interviewees argue that the pass standard should be raised, that foundations courses should be abolished or that the NCV duration of three years should be shortened. On the maturity side, some interviewees suggest that the payment of the bursary should be conditioned on class attendance or academic performance. The policy of admitting learners with very different levels of academic preparation to a program with a challenging curriculum creates a massive task for teachers and learners. Recognizing this issue, one FET college has created a bridging program to help prepare learners for the rigors of FET college courses (Stuart, 2014).

The concerns expressed by students and lecturers speak to a broader critique of the purpose of the NCV. Secondary school learners who pass the NSC prefer to go to university and several interviewees suggest that the NCV curriculum is too challenging for learners who have dropped out of high school. There is no clear answer to this question: the NCV level four qualification must mean something, specifically that a learner has met a certain academic standard. In City Press (2012), Andre Kraak, a researcher on education and skills in South Africa argues that the NCV is a good example of policy failure. Kraak argues that the NCV is ill-conceived: the NCV is a misfit in South Africa's education system and doesn't provide sufficient training to allow learners to transition to the workforce. It is puzzling then that one lecturer notes that NCV courses at the FET College were oversubscribed in 2014 (FETC Lecturer 1). Nationally, FET college enrollments (in the NCV and the NATED) are growing. Perhaps several factors, or a combination of them, explain this phenomenon: there are more youth who want to attend higher education than there are university spaces, many learners enroll solely to gain access to the bursary, and many learners see FET College and the NCV program as the only available step towards attaining their goal of a bright future.

Lecturers, in loco parentis?

For nearly all NCV learners, college is a new experience. As with secondary school teachers, some of the lecturers I interviewed saw themselves not only as lecturers, but also as parents, counselors and mentors. The following exchange articulates this thinking.

Interviewee: You know I am a part-time psychologist here.

I ask for clarification

Interviewee: You know when you do education, it's...what's the...loco parentis

Interviewer: In loco parentis

Interviewee: A lot of learners. Their parents at home may not be educated. At the beginning of class I have to be sure: are they completely here before I even give the lesson? You need to be heard. You need to have a purpose. I ask myself, "are my learners here?" I am doing psychology in any case, counseling...I wait until the first exam and we see how they do. And some of them...[don't perform well]. Then you start interfering and once you interfere, they open up. We've got learners who are still young. Who come from poor families. Who head the household, who are living by themselves.

...

I had this girl from Pietersburg. In June she didn't come back. Her grandparents wouldn't pay; they didn't have the money. I wanted her to come back; I talked to her grandparents; I took her in until the end of the year. (FETC Lecturer 2)

Like the secondary school teachers, both of these lecturers recognize learners as whole human beings – with different histories, families, living situations, and interests. These differences require teachers to engage with learners in different ways. A few learners (FETC Student 3 and 8) echo this sentiment. Of course, my interview pool likely suffers from a selection bias: teachers and lecturers willing to voluntarily participate in this research may be different from those not willing to participate.

Several learners noted that some lecturers are rude or disrespectful to learners and that some lecturers were not committed to their job. A few learners and one lecturer note that lecturer absenteeism is a problem on campus. One learner shares his experience:

At times you find that you get to class and the class is locked, the lecturer is late or is absent and there is no notice saying tomorrow I will be absent or next week I will be absent for 3 or 4 days...I feel a total turn down when you get to class and its locked especially in the morning. In the morning you are still fresh and you find that the lecturer is late or is absent and you sit there ... we lose the interest of continuing the rest of the day...it [lecturer absenteeism] happens quite a lot with us here that we find some lecturers absent and there is no notice that they are late or they are absent. Some do notice us and give us work to do while they are away but some they just don't care and nothing is done. (FETC Student 2)

In an informal meeting with the Campus Director, he stated that he was having severe problems with lecturer absenteeism and that he was having lecturers sign an attendance register to show that they were attending classes (Research memorandum, March 5, 2014).

Echoing the White Paper (DHET, 2014) and critiques in peer-reviewed journals (Allais, 2012), some learners and lecturers stated that some of the lecturers at the College campus are poorly prepared in terms of subject matter knowledge and pedagogy. All three lecturers interviewed comment on this, as do some learners, as indicated by the quotes below.

Lecturers themselves, they confessed that yho! This [NCV] curriculum – some of the things we also don't even know them. (FETC Lecturer 1)

You know all the NATED teachers transferred to NCV. Some lecturers don't have the content knowledge, expertise to teach the subject. Some lecturers see themselves as working on the NATED [only]. (FETC Lecturer 3)

With the NCV, first of all I think the ability of the lecturer to connect and interact. The passing of information. Because some people struggle to know the subject, to know how to do it especially in maths. A person can be good with maths but cannot be good in teaching maths. So the passing of information that's where I find challenging for most lecturers. (FETC Student 2)

We're in "college!" Or, "learners adrift"

There are several features which distinguish the NCV from the NSC. Two important differences are the age of the students and the location of the school. The average NCV student is several years older than the average secondary school student. NCV students have either dropped out of secondary school, or, in some instances completed grade 12 and passed their NSC, but did not gain entrance to university. A second important difference is that the NCV takes place on a College campus and, often, far away from the home of the student. Students enrolled in the NCV program may be living far from home, making new friends and experiencing a new social environment. The FET College campus offers new opportunities and distractions. Learners are asking themselves: what does it mean to be a college student and some are "fitting" into evolving social orders. One learner notes, "My first year here, it was kind of scary...cause, well, I'm very shy and I'm not used to a lot of crowds. ...I went to a very small high school. So coming here it was big, a lot of different people. It was kind of challenging to make friends. You don't know which friends to make. Are you making the wrong friends? (FETC Student 2) One lecture characterizes learners as "skimming." Over the course of the interview the lecturer speaks to the change she sees in some learners.

Most come from Limpopo. Had schools that were not well-resourced. They're not used to the local kind of life [urban life in the township]. They start adopting these silly behaviors. They just want to fit into the gang. They're afraid to speak up. They're skimming. ...The real reason they're here, they're not sure of. ...Soon they start to realize it's "all on me." Then they start thinking, 'what can we do?' They are not socialized in the foundation phase. [Here] they start to behave like college ladies dressing better, taking responsibility. (FETC Lecturer 2)

One learner speaks to the intersection of being at college and the role of the surroundings – the new freedom (e.g., no parents or teachers looking over your shoulder), the less rigid educational structure (e.g., no uniforms, no school bells), and the availability of urban distractions (e.g., taverns) on education. He states,

Some people are really like ignorant, they have that don't care attitude and behaviors; things like not showing commitment to your work, not doing your work, coming late or absenteeism. All those things those are the things that the college is having challenges with because it's a college now they cannot call your parents, they cannot say your child didn't come to school or was late todayThe surroundings here also play a major role in trying to keep students here at campus because there is Spar [local grocery store] here, there is taverns over there, there is lots of things, lots of things to go and have fun outside. So if I'm gonna have that 50 bucks I'm gonna tell my friend hey I have 50 bucks, how much do you have? He has 50 bucks and I say let's see whether we can go have 2 beers outside and we go out. If this school was in those areas where there is no bottle stores and there is no taverns the only ideas we will have is about school. Because if I'm gonna walk 1 or 2 kms to get a beer it's not gonna motivate me to get there. But if I'm gonna get it around the corner I might say let me catch two [drinks] and quickly get back to school but once you get those two you are not gonna come back. (FETC Student 2)

Strikes, protests, bursaries, and pending results

Strikes and protests are a regular occurrence in many South African townships. As indicated in Figure 11, “protests,” in fact, has its own section on the webpage of a South African news service, News24. A look at last week's news [the week of September 21, 2014] shows student protests at Vaal university of Technology and Tshwane university of Technology as well as several service delivery protests which affect education in basic and secondary schools. The protests are not light matters either: major roads are blocked with rocks, students light buses on fire, and police fire tear gas and rubber bullets at students. During the period of this study, major mining unions went on strike and the Marikana trial, during which the South African Police Service was questioned about the killing of 37 striking miners, was held. In townships, by and large, protests are about service delivery (e.g., housing, water and sanitation, political representation and electricity). Protests also respond to alleged cronyism around

government work programs (e.g., public works jobs meant for unemployed citizens are given as political handouts) and corrupt contacting practices (Grant, 2014).⁸⁰

Figure 11: News24 Tag “protests”⁸¹

The screenshot shows the News24 website with a navigation bar at the top containing links to OLX, PriceCheck, Property24, Kalahari.com, Careers24, and Spree. The main content area displays several news articles related to protests:

- Protesters block Golden Highway with rocks** (2014-09-23 07:18, 103 comments): Protesters of the Lehae area in the south of Johannesburg outside Lenasia have blockaded the Golden Highway with rocks making it inaccessible to motorists.
 - Daveyton residents block streets, burn tyres **WATCH**
 - Metro cops: Riverlea protesters stoning cars
 - Angry Gauteng protesters stone cars
- Tembisa protesters hand over memorandum**
- Grabouw meeting comes to an agreement** (2014-09-22 19:30): A meeting between municipal representatives and role players behind last week's protest in Grabouw, has led to an agreement on the way forward for the Western Cape town.
 - Grabouw meeting ends in violence
 - Grabouw violence organised guerilla-style - MEC
 - Tear gas used to disperse Grabouw protesters
- TUT protests marring education - Nzimande** (2014-09-22 13:12): Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande has condemned the violent protests at the Tshwane University of Technology.
 - TUT to continue talks with student leaders
 - TUT shuts down campuses
 - 18 cars torched at TUT
- TUT to continue talks with student leaders** (2014-09-22 08:20, 87 comments): The Tshwane University of Technology will continue talks with student leaders in an effort to reopen its campuses, the institution says.
 - TUT shuts down campuses
 - 18 cars torched at TUT
 - Sasco: NSFAS was out of order
- Northern Cape pupils back at school after protests** (2014-09-22 13:12): Pupils in Kuruman in the Northern Cape have returned to school after months of protests and disruptions to get a new road built.
 - Some Northern Cape pupils still staying away
 - No end to Northern Cape pupil intimidation
 - Northern Cape schools back to normal
- Parly: School disruptions concerning** (2014-09-21 13:25): The way school pupils were being compromised because of service delivery protests was concerning, Parliament's portfolio committee on basic education says.
 - 'No road, no school' protest costs Kuruman pupils a year
 - Rights of kids kept out of school 'violated'
 - Madonsela: Let Kuruman pupils go to school
- Strong emotions outside Cape Town 'open' mosque** (2014-09-19 16:02)

During the period of this research, the FET College campus, like many in South Africa was under a lot of stress: there were several student protests, teachers' strikes and threats of teachers' strikes, as well as allegations of collusion between lecturers and students to disrupt campus operations. According to FET College students I interviewed, student strikes were based on the allegation that transportation bursaries,

⁸⁰ <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-02-12-research-shows-sharp-increase-in-service-delivery-protests>

⁸¹ <http://www.news24.com/Tags/Topics/protests>

which were supposed to be provided to enrolled students in the form of debit cards, had been stolen and used by the FET College administration staff. One student explains that the reason for her becoming involved in the student council was because “there are too many crooks here [at the FET College campus],” (FETC Learner 8). She elaborates,

They wanted us to apply for this bursary and after you have applied for it you are getting the ATM card. Then you should go and withdraw your money. Those people from NASFAS they bring the cards here at school and these people here they give the cards to themselves. They were not issued out to students. (FETC Student 8)

That afternoon, the afternoon of the date of the interview, the student says that the student council is holding a “mass meeting” to “call on the students” so they are “aware that if the bursary has approved you, you have your money.” She also states that the purpose of the meeting is to ask management “how are you ... going to deal with this matter because your people at the back there they are having the money...they don’t want to issue it out to the students. Are you aware of this and that?” (FETC Learner 8). A level 4 student explains what happened in prior years at the same FET College.

Around September [in 2011] they [the administration] started calling us to come collect the cards....You know some of the students they got the cards, some they didn’t. ...I didn’t get the card. I got the card around 2012...when I got the card I started complaining because look, I’ve got the card now but they can’t even pay for [my] 2011 transport allowance. Where is it? ...others they didn’t get the money, others did get. ...they went to the system it shows, here is your money. I don’t know is it NAFSAS, is it province, or what? We started protesting in 2012...That strike was so huge some of the students they got arrested. Actually one student. (FETC Student 3)

Other reasons for student strikes include delayed delivery of learning materials and the issue of pending results. Two learners spoke at length about pending results. In the NCV, a learner can pass or fail a subject, or get a pending result. A pending result may mean that some assignment or tests were missed (and need to be made up). Two learners spoke at length about the issue of pending results indicating that “a lot” of students receive pending results (FETC Student 3) and “some students they say they have written all their assignments and all their tests but still the result come pending” (FETC Student 5). The extent to which different factors contributing to the issue of pending results is unclear, however having a pending result clearly keeps NCV learners from

transitioning to the next NQF level (i.e., transitioning from NQF level 3 to NQF level 4, the exit level for the NCV).

Conflicts in the FET College extend to issues between lecturers and the campus administration. The textbox below includes an excerpt from a memo I wrote after a meeting with the Campus Director on teacher unrest. The CD shares his challenges and frustrations in dealing with teachers who, from his perspective, were too often absent, not doing their job and disrespecting his office.

MEETING WITH CAMPUS DIRECTOR (CD), RE: TEACHER UNREST
March 5, 2014

PERSPECTIVE IS FROM THE CD's POINT OF VIEW

The engineering department has been without a Head of Department (HOD) for some time. According to the CD, there are a lot of problems with lecturers – their coming late to class, not respecting the timetable, not tracking students, absenteeism, etc.

The CD needed a new HOD of the engineering dept. He put out an advert; no one answered; then he appointed someone internally who had been a lecturer, but had strong management experience from another department. Members of the engineering faculty were angry. However, the CD had had this decision approved from the FET College central office

One meeting included a union representative.

A second meeting on Friday happened where about 10 faculty burst into the office of the CD and demanded to meet with him. Because of the problems with absenteeism, the CD was having lecturers sign in. They didn't like this; they didn't like the HOD decision. They spoke for an hour....during which time classes should have been taking place. The CD got attendance so he could know who was there.

The CD is looking to fire all of them...they have been missing classes, have been insubordinate (disrespecting his office). According to a ruling from the high court [in Pretoria], he can fire all the teachers because it is illegal to go on strike.⁸²

He is waiting to fire them, pending his ability to replace them.

⁸² It is not clear if the CD's understanding of the high court ruling is correct. In South Africa, it is legal for teachers to strike. In 2013, the ANC sought to designate teaching to be an "essential service" which would have made teachers' strikes illegal, however, this effort did not come to fruition.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/04/us-safrica-anc-idUSBRE9130PZ20130204>

No recognition, no partners

FET colleges appear to be on a lonely mission. Half of the interviewees stated that the NCV either wasn't understood or recognized by industry and several lecturers and learners argued that lack of support from industry resulted in many NCV students getting very little work exposure. While all learners expressed the joy in the practical experience on campus only two appeared to have off campus work placements – filing at a local hospital. This is a particular challenge for NATED students who require a work-placement, an internship, to qualify for certification. One student notes, “when I was checking on the internet I saw they [employers] needed N6, N4, and N3. I don't see NCV there...The main point, I'm going to do NATED so that I have a job” (FETC Student 3). The learner agrees that the NCV provided him the qualification to get into a NATED course, but argues that completing the NCV took a lot of time. One lecturer argues that the FET colleges focus on NATED, noting, “our [NCV] students are not ready for the workplace” (FETC Lecturer 3). One FET College lecturer and one other adult interviewee offer an argument in line with the skills discourse: that NCV courses are still are not aligned well enough with the needs of industry. Interviews at this FET College and one other FET College suggest that industry is an unreliable partner: very few industries are partnering FET colleges to support student work placement, internships and learner ships. One interviewee adds that “in the old days” there were good internships, based at businesses, and businesses had training centers which that got tax relief for providing to FET learners (Policy 4). He then adds that in the present environment, learnerships and internship either don't happen, or aren't that good.

Is school a place to learn values?

The quote that piqued my interest in this theme comes from a study in Kenya (Sivi-Nojonjo & Mwangola, 2011) where youth indicate that secondary education in Kenya is “without values.” One secondary school teacher echoes this critique, indicating that DHET/DBE the push for tertiary and jobs is without values (SS Teacher 2). The from which this quote emerged was one where secondary education had been reduced to an exam preparation process. Learners were focused on absorption and regurgitation of factual knowledge so as to perform well on the high school leaving exam and thereby

gain access to limited spaces in university education, and following that, gain access to the limited number of secure formal sector jobs. In the past decades, secondary schools in several countries have introduced new subjects (e.g., life orientation in several countries, including South Africa, peace education in Kenya) and supported school-level diversity and inclusion initiatives (for South Africa see Vandeyar, 2009 and Jansen, 2008). In South Africa, the Department for Basic Education requires all secondary school learners to take Life Orientation.

One definition of values is the “principles or standards of behavior; one’s judgment of what is important in life.” In 2000, the then South Africa Department of Education commissioned a report on *Values, Education and Democracy* which found that “value construction is intimately related to how people think and construct meaning, and the relationship between action and ideas” (DoE, 2000, p. 8). The report outlines values (and different interpretations of values) as identified by parents, learners and educators. Values discussed include: Respect, Honesty, Love, Kindness, Discipline, Communication, Quality Education, Equity, Tolerance, Openness, Accountability and Honor. The subject Life Orientation (LO) speaks to some of these issues. Life Orientation is a required subject for all secondary school students. LO is “designed to inculcate morals, values, physical education and career guidance to learners” (DBE, 2014a, p. 96). DBE (2014) adds,

The importance of this subject has been repeatedly emphasized in many fora, especially with regard to the challenges of building a united society in South Africa. Given the high rates of teenage pregnancy, unemployment, poverty, abuse, family breakdowns and unplanned urbanization, teaching teenage children essential knowledge and skills about how to navigate life’s challenges is an essential part of their education. (p.87)

As a part of its review of the NSC, *The Ministerial Task Team Report on the National Senior Certificate* reviewed academic literature and evaluative publications on LO and also asked for public comment on the importance of LO in secondary schools. The Task Force found that in general LO was not being given “serious attention or not taught well” in most secondary schools. Even so, comments from the public, researchers and schools indicated a significant need for LO-type interventions. The DBE (2014) report notes,

Principals reported that learners appeared to be lacking in value systems, there was a lack of parental involvement and support, there was also a lack of parental discipline and authority at home, and the community was negatively influencing the learners' behavior through failure to abide by the law and the general societal problems of abuse, violence and criminality. This was exacerbated by the lack of proper role models on the teaching staff and difficulties with the Department of Education policies and issues related to cultural diversity. (p.94)

The Task Force report offers several recommendations on LO, including that it be removed as an examinable subject and preferences a need for more properly trained LO teachers in schools and in particular for teachers with expertise in physical education and career counselling (DBE, 2014). In my questions to interviewees I asked what it meant to become a good adult and what they had to say about the role of education vis-à-vis issues of diversity and values.

The intersection of education, values, and society

Learners and lecturers at the secondary school and the FET College generally agreed that values and diversity are important issues. Many in fact, reflected on whether “society has lost its values” (FETC Lecturer 1). However, interviewees were mixed in terms of whether they thought education and schooling did or should grapple with teaching values. Many NSC and NCV learners indicated that they found LO to be useful; however, nearly the same number suggested that “values begin at home.” Several learners provided examples of teachers and other adults at school demonstrating bad values such as disrespect and theft. Teachers, at the NSC level especially, argued that a large number of learners did not receive proper guidance at home and saw themselves as playing a parental, counseling, and social work role. Many learners in turn looked to teachers for counseling, guidance, and mentoring support. Exchanges with two secondary school teachers speak to the complex intersection between education, values, and society.

What influences our school, especially the performance of the learners, especially in this area: it is mainly outside the school premises. Things like drugs you see, and then these xenophobia cases; you see...where the foreigner's shops are being attacked and so on. These they influence, they had a very far reaching impact on the performance of our learnersYou cannot, yeah, you cannot control that. So performance of our learners is influenced by such things.

...our debating team was debating about the causes of the high failure rate in secondary schools. They said drugs and alcohol is the major cause of high failure rate in schools. So, most of our learners or some of our learners they are involved in this cheap drugs [e.g., Nyaope].⁸³ Because they are able to access those type of drugs and as a result they lose focus of academic obligation. (SS Teacher 1)

A second teacher from the same school notes,

Interviewee: In my culture we say it takes a whole village to raise a child. And every school they are doing something to create a better society out there but most of the role is being done by the schools and the outside society is not doing anything. The responsibility has been left to the teacher. The last man, the street bureaucrat. The teacher is the one who implements everything, right? The pressure is mounting on the teacher. The teacher is the one doing everything. The parents are also careless about these children. You ask them to come 'your child is doing this.' They don't come. 'Can you please report here?' They don't come. 'We need to discuss the progress of your child.' They don't come. You ask the learners, 'who helped you with the homework?' 'I did it alone.' Do your parents know what you are doing? In which grade? Some of them don't even know what grade is their son or daughter; I mean this is a parent. And you are now leaving it to the teacher saying the teacher has to do everything. And you are saying. Looking at the issue of crime that I have touched on, it has to do with that. If they are left alone these kids by the parent. I mean you look at these kids here, Grade 9, Grade 10 they are already smoking, at that age.

Interviewer: Are they smoking tobacco, Nyaope or cigarettes or they smoke anything?

Interviewee: Everything. Anything that can be smoked they do smoke and then you look at that age where did it come from? We receive these children from primary level and they are already like that. They learn it from home. There is no proper care. This needs the whole society as a whole. The parents, the police, the government and why am I saying this? I'm comparing my country [Zimbabwe] and here because the first thing that you have to build in a child is discipline because for you to run a school kids must have discipline, academic discipline. And you look at these kids here they don't have.

They don't even know why they are here. If you do something without a reason of doing it, it won't matter, it's not important in your life. If you do something with a reason that if I do something this way, this is what I want to do in future it won't matter but these guys they don't even know the importance of education. They don't even have an idea of why they are doing this. As teachers we have tried to say this, let's try and create a better society but sometimes it becomes very hard for us as well. And sometimes, I don't want to lie, as teachers not all of us

⁸³ Nyaope is an inexpensive drug which produces a short high and is made using anti-retroviral medications.

have the same goal. Some would just let it go and say you know what s/he is not my child. I don't care. So it needs a dedicated society, everyone should be hands on to say let's do this, let's do this. This is the future of our country. We let them - --- society it's going to be a problem. (SS Teacher 2)

These exchanges speak to the complexity and brokenness of world in which many students live: parents are absent; there is violence and unrest in the community (e.g., domestic violence, xenophobic violence, and criminal violence); there is peer pressure to smoke and drink alcohol at a young age. Here again, teachers feel embattled, they are the "street bureaucrat" tasked, alone, to "create a better society."

Can values be learned at school? Teachers and learners are split on this issue.

Many learners argue that values begin at home. In the exchange below, the learner makes a distinction between what you learn at home and what you learn in school.

Interviewee: The purpose is good education so that you can get a job so I think secondary education is for you to get a good job. We are working for a job here, nothing more. It's all about getting a job ...so that we can be self-sufficient. Live by your own pocket.

Interviewer: Then it sounds like the key to being self-sufficient is to find a job?

Interviewee: Yes to find a job. And for you to get a good job you have to go to school. To be a good parent we learn from our parents. The parents that we are going to become is the parents that our parents are. We learn more on how to be good citizens from our parents. Our parents are like role models. As for getting a good job I think you have to go to school, go to varsity and get a good job (SS Learner 8)

Other learners state that they learn values at church. This perspective is shared by a DBE staff member at the district level who states, "learning values and honesty and kindness and skills to resolve conflict, those are skills that I would say belongs to the education that the child should receive at home or at church" (Policy 2). The learner below identifies learning values to be important, but states that it's hard to learn values at school. She says,

Interviewee 2: Learning values - being honest, kind and supporting each other being confident all the time because when you are kind and honest all the time, obviously your self-esteem is very high and you can try and improve other people's self-esteem. I think it's one of the important values.

Interviewer: I was asking those because people learn different things from different places so you might be learning more of... learning these values at church but maybe not more at school.

Interviewee 2: Not as much as in school. Because in school you do what you want. If a person is narrow to you, [you] don't have to respect a person that does not respect you. Learning values at school is not very easy. (SS Learner 6)

An FET College learner explains the difficulty of teaching values at school, stating,

Now in our culture there is a saying that you wanna strengthen a stick, you wanna mold it while it's still wet because when its dry its gonna break. So in a way when they are taught here [at the FET College] to be good people they are not gonna listen because what methods are you gonna use to teach them here? Because they are not used to reason, they are used to doing things their way or no way at all, some people are like that. It's either my way or no way at all because it's a thing that he grew up with. If you teach him not to grow up with it at an early age he learns to tolerate other people, he learns to adjust to other people. If a group of people believes in these things and they get to college and you tell them not to believe in this thing it's really not gonna work. Now it puts a lot of pressure on the FET to actually try and turn that around because you cannot, here I have only 3 years to learn and I cannot turn around what I have learnt in 17 years or 18 years in 3 years so that puts a lot of pressure on the FET trying to turn around what I have been doing for 17 years. (FETC Student 3)

Despite the issues, many teachers and learners emphasized the importance of teaching values at school. One learner notes that "some children come from homes [where they get no support]. but if he comes to school, he can learn values from others, his teachers, his peers," (SS Learner 3). Teachers echo this sentiment, with one stating, "at home, the learners are not told about these values things. We must at school teach things that parents cannot teach their children. Yeah, it pays to be honest, it pays to be patient, it is important to be kind, to be honest, to be kind. What does it mean to be kind?" (SS Teacher 1). Several other NSC students echo that school can be a place to learn values.

Many interviewees suggested that they equate increasing access to school as a ways to decrease youth involvement in criminal activities and drug-use. One older student at the FET College notes, "Currently we have a problem of crime. We must be trying to minimize that. By giving youth the work or the free education. ...Opening access is good, [FET college is] a good space for learners" (FETC Student 9). Another student notes that, "the community should have different programs like they should have

a sports area where youth should play soccer in order to avoid drugs and certain things like crime” (FETC Student 7). School was identified as a safe space. At the FET College students are searched. They are “not allowed to enter with harmful substances, weapons are not allowed” (FETC Student 7). As noted earlier, several secondary school learners wanted to repair the school fence so that the secondary school campus will be a safer space.

As indicated in the previous chapter, several interviewees indicate a relationship between self-knowledge, values and social values. One notes, “for you to succeed in life you have to know what you want and that goes with values because if I don’t respect others that means I won’t be able to succeed because sometimes I will need [name of friend] to help me with something so if I don’t respect her that means that I won’t get that help that she has for me (SS Learner 1). The learner continues,

LO shows steps on how to find yourself , who you are , what you love...so I think...how to learn about myself I have to realize my weak points, my strengths so that’s where I get who am I. And people around me because someone will tell you, if you do this and that, it doesn’t suit you. So that means that person can see something in you that you never saw. So, after some time you realize it and you know if I do this, it doesn’t suit me, so it’s part of learning about yourself. (SS Learner 1)

Another different secondary school learner states that learning values is one of the most important types of learning. She notes,

Interviewee 2: Everyone has to know what he or she values. For example, I value education because with education I know where I am going. You know, sometimes it’s not easy to face the world. It’s not easy to go for an interview if you are not from school, you are illiterate. So being a person with values helps you to build up your life like the reality, you will know who are you and...yeah I think for...a person without values goes...I don’t know what to say...

Interviewer: ...a person without values...they...

Interviewee 2: Yeah...It’s hard. (SS Learner 2)

Interpretations of values, of course, may vary. Many adult interviewees spoke of the importance of respecting elders, an issue which learners did not speak to. One teacher speaks of respecting elders, and intersects that discussion with the relationship between values, self-knowledge and getting a job. He notes,

The first time I was here you get a learner who is late and they just open the class and go and sit down. I’m okay ‘where are your manners? I mean I’m in charge

here. You come to me and say ‘good morning sir, I’m sorry I am late.’ I say okay you take a seat. Don’t do that tomorrow. You find these learners disrespectful ...When you get a job, you were saying --- about mathematics you have an ‘A’ in mathematics, an ‘A’ in physical science, now there is a job and you have to go for an interview for the job. maths does not work for that interview either. Yes they might ask about that but they want to see the real you. Out of the interview that you went to you have been short listed. What made them shortlist you is the qualifications. Now they want to see the passion in you, how stable are you, now they want to see the life traits in you. ...We are teaching them to say that getting ‘As’ is not everything there is another moral aspect about values, how to treat yourself, how to treat others in the society, how to be respectful, how to be confident. (SS Teacher 2)

This discussion on values is not meant to identify a list of values which must be acted out or prioritized in secondary education. Rather it is to emphasize that “values”, that is, *principles or standards of behavior, one’s judgment of what is important in life* cannot be separated from our understandings of education, the process of schooling, and the social environment of learners. Put another way, the construction of secondary education and the processes of secondary schooling will always privilege and make manifest some set of values. Which values do learners and educators agree are important? To what extent are these values (or others) acted out in social relations?

We don’t talk about diversity, not much

Many secondary school and FET College interviewees acknowledged the presence of ethnic, linguistic, religious and other types of diversity at school and many acknowledged the importance of being able to work with people from different communities and different tribes and with different beliefs, different behaviors. However, at the same time, several interviewees indicated that diversity was not substantively engaged with at the FET College or at the secondary school. Secondary school learners appear more enthusiastic about life orientation than did FET College learners. NSC learners note that, “people are different. At our homes we live with people that we’re used to, we know them in and out but when we come to school we meet people with different behaviors from our families and friends at home” (SS Learner 2) and “we learn most of the things here [at school], we make new friends, we meet new people...see how and hear how they view the world” (SS Learner 1). Two other NSC learners express enthusiasm for LO, noting,

Interviewee 2: Ya it's a good curriculum for me because even if I know my culture, I know my values and beliefs I can understand other people's cultures and beliefs. Other people's diversity and don't humiliate them because of their diversity.

...

Interviewee 1: LO it teaches us about other people's cultures and it helps us intervene with different cultures and different beliefs and also it teaches us not to...exclude other people because of their color or their culture. (SS Learners 13 &14)

Many NCV learners appeared to take the course in stride, but few seemed enthusiastic about it. One noted, "Sometimes you know you learn to pass, you don't learn to understand. You learn for the sake of the final exam just to pass. So when it comes to learning about diversity and what-what [a common catch-all phrase], according to me I think it's helping. ...Life Orientation, Life Orientation, I believe is a subject that is meant to upgrade our minds to learn life. It's just to orient us to learn life so when they talk of learning gender, inequality, diversity, it is there. But I don't know when we done with it are we gonna learn it that side [apply it outside] but for myself I have learnt something man" (FETC Student 3). Other exchanges suggest less interest in learning about diversity.

Interviewer: There are a lot of people here from many different places and speaking many different languages. What do you think about this? About diversity?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's nice sharing about ourselves to be talking about diversity

Interviewer: Do you talk about it in the classroom?

Interviewee: No we don't talk about diversity. (FETC Student 6)

Interviewer: Many people will talk about diversity and things like that, is that something they talk about very much here?

Interviewee: No

Interviewer: Maybe not in classes but what about at lunch or other times with your friends?

Interviewee: Unfortunately I don't have time. (FETC Student 7)

Some learners offered specific examples of how issues of "race", language, class, religion, violence and crime divided people in South Africa. One student speaks of such an experience.

You know Zulus and Xhosas are different cultures, different beliefs. If I grew up, I'm a Sotho; I grew up in a Sotho school. If I come here and befriend a Zulu and

he grew up in Zululand where it's all about Zulu, where it's all about them, we actually not gonna go along with each other and when we get here we gonna put a lot of pressure on the FET in trying to make us get along or in trying to make us find some balance between us.

[offers an example] Because you gonna go to a taxi rank especially in Joburg, you can go to a taxi rank there and speak Sotho and ask for directions, they will give you a wrong direction because they don't know and you come back speaking in Zulu they will tell you the direction. I actually at one point had the same scenario where I went to Joburg with my friends, they went first and we came after them. They asked for directions for taxis there and they showed them a different [the wrong] taxi and I came and I asked them in Zulu and they showed me the correct taxi. So they are used to the thing of I'm a Zulu, why should I learn Tswana, Xhosa or Sotho because I'm a Zulu. Now if you wanna talk to me you will use my language, they are not accommodating.

The learner continues,

Now for instance when they grew up in a more diverse society whereas there is a lot of people, a lot of cultures, they learn to actually accommodate other languages, other cultures. So that when they get here its more easier to actually get along with other people so I think if they could actually put some initiatives in place to learn such things. ... You know make schools that are multi-racial...in LO where they tell you Christians believe in Jesus Christ. That's where they end. They don't tell you why they believe in Jesus Christ and what-abouts of Jesus Christ and what not. So if they could have subjects that actually teach about different religious, that could help people tolerate or finding a balance in accepting others who belief in different things. So yeah, I think multi-racial society in schools I think would help. (FETC Student 2)

Interestingly, issues of diversity often came up when FET College students talked about the importance of “communication” in the workplace. Here issues of diversity took on an instrumental role – awareness of and respect for difference made one a more effective communicator in the workplace.

The question of the role of schooling in building a non-racial society looms large in South Africa. The ethos of South African Schools Act (1996), the first major piece of post-apartheid education legislation, was a vision of “learners who will be inspired by the values of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice” (p. 21). Many learners in secondary schools and FET Colleges are quite aware of how issues of “race,” language, ethnic, class, geography, and gender create divisions in society. What is less clear is the extent to which schools continue to identify “building a non-racial South Africa” as a part of their mission.

School as a site of lived values

Several learners and teachers identified school as a space where values were acted out. At secondary school, teachers spoke of students' lack of academic discipline (e.g., completing homework), the administration's failure to instill discipline (e.g., coming to school on time, going to class on time, not skipping class, and not smoking on campus) and teachers' taking on parental roles where they expressed love, caring, respect, and concern for learners. By and large, learners at the FET College expressed feelings of mistrust and disrespect from many lecturers and the administration. Students expressed concern about the administration, and its alleged theft of students' bursary money, frustration on the issue of pending results, which kept many learners from progressing to the next level of classes, and disrespect from teachers, some of whom were often absent and some of whom mocked them. When asked what could be changed about the school, one student states "being honest with us, that would be very appreciated. That is what we want from them, honesty. Because without that we won't be having professional nurses, we won't be having doctors" (FETC Student 8).

Inequality

In July 2014, a senior government official overseeing education in Gauteng province proposed that former Model C schools be merged with historically black secondary schools. He is quoted in the local press saying, "I can't preside over a tweaked apartheid education system, with poorly resourced schools existing side by side with rich ones." His proposal to "crush the backbone of apartheid education" was met with a lot of surprise in the popular press, however, his diagnosis, the presence of pervasive inequality in the provision of secondary schooling between rich and poor communities, was no surprise to anyone.⁸⁴

Half of the NSC students I interviewed indicated that they were well aware of the unequal provision of resources to schools in South Africa. They noted, "our school is poor" and then spoke to the lack of lab equipment, the presence of broken windows and classroom doors, the late arriving textbooks, the lack of access to computers and internet

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<http://politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en//page71619?oid=652164&sn=Detail&pid=71616>
http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/mixed-response-to-schools-merging-plan-1.1717768#.VCKFD_mSwRo

and the fact they were behind in the syllabus. As I mentioned earlier, during the period of my research, electricity at the secondary school was out for three months. Issues of inequality were often spoken of in a comparative way. One teacher speaks of inequality in terms of geography and knowledge of English. He speaks at length,

If I could classify it and say we have learners from the townships, we have learners from mid-density suburbs and learners from low density suburbs. They go to different schools. ...These learners [at this secondary school] are passionate, they want to learn. Their backgrounds affect them. ...if you look at these learners, socially where they are coming from they are coming from poor backgrounds. Academically they are also poor - how- you are looking at a society where they have been talking their local language and when you look at my subject that I'm teaching, it's Physical Science, it's in English, these learners are struggling with English.

You take a learner from the location [township] and a learner from the low density suburbs, those learners [from the suburbs] are well equipped with English, they do not struggle with English and then you have learners from the townships. For them now that's why I said they are academically poor for them to engage in the academic world its difficult. Something that you say in class they understand, they want to ask a question, they don't understand. I have experienced this because I'm also a foreigner I do not speak the local language, for them to respond to me they have to ask questions in English and it is very difficult for them to ask questions because of that language barrier. If I could compare a student maybe from [name of ex-Model-C school where he tutors]... Their English is okay. You talk to them and the English is good, you give them something to do the English is good. That advantage of knowing English, they are always at an upper hand than the locations [townships]. (SS Teacher 2)

This passage speaks to the insufficiency of “resource-transfer” solutions to inequality. For many learners, the fact that their home language is also the dominant language of business and government conveys social and cultural capital advantages which are difficult to address using equity-improving programs conceptualized through “economics of education” thinking. Learners, of course, also learn a lot from their peers. If a learner's peers are also academically ambitious and afforded opportunities for well-rounded learning outside of school, then less affluent learners in the same school may benefit from exposure to such peers (Benito et al., 2014).

At the FET College, many learners identified equity issues including lack of resources, absent or non-engaged teachers and unresponsive or corrupt administration. Learners juxtaposed their schooling experience with an imagined ideal. For example,

they thought that at universities, students got sufficient resources and respect and that at ex-Model C schools, all teachers were dedicated, there were sufficient learning materials, and learners were able to choose from a wider variety of subjects, learning experiences and extra-curricular activities. Here learners explicitly and implicitly recognize the impact of inequality in education: many know they are attending “second-tier” schools and consider their own educational experience from a deficiency lens. It could be argued that the perceptions of “second-class” status and lived experiences of poor foundational education, inequality, poor resourcing and antagonism between teachers and learners and within school teaching and administrative staff re-enforce “second-class” expectations and performance. This dynamic further diminishes conceptions and expectations of education, especially among learners described as “low-achieving” by dominant measurements of learning.

Recommendations from learners and teachers

At the end of each interview, I asked interviewees, if they were face to face with the Minister for Basic Education or Higher Education, what recommendations they would make to improve secondary education (the NSC or the NCV). Some of their recommendations are included in the previous two chapters. This section summarizes interviewee recommendations.

At the FET College, the most frequent recommendations among students and lecturers included, addressing resource shortages (4 students, 3 lecturers), addressing the mix of Grade 9 and Grade 12 learners (3 students, 3 lecturers), addressing lecturer issues, such as absenteeism, capacity, and respect of students (3 students, 3 lecturers) and improving administration of the bursary (5 students). Resource concerns included improving access to computer labs and internet, late arrival or insufficient number of workshop materials and textbooks, the high cost of some required materials which weren't covered by the bursary and insufficient equipment for simulations. For all of the discourse on technology, some FET colleges appear to have some distance to go to ensure that all learners who want to do so develop computer skills and have access to the internet. One learner notes, “the computer lab is always full. We have another lab for LO. We do have classes with computers, but if someone is using the classroom, we can't

use the computers” (FETC Student 6). This student is in the IT occupational area and many of her assignments require her to use computers and to write program code. The learner doesn’t have a computer at home, so not having regular, predictable access to computers makes it difficult for her to complete her homework

Another ardently voiced concern was the enrollment of different levels of learners in the NCV program. Several students and lecturers indicated that a large number of students, mostly secondary school dropouts, did not take school seriously, did not have academic discipline, were not sufficiently academically prepared for the NCV curriculum, or were enrolled only to get the bursary. Lecturers I interviewed suggested that the lower level of academic preparation, and sometimes maturity, frustrated NCV lecturers who were used to working with older and more self-directed NATED learners. This concern is echoed in the academic discourse as well as in the EV2 research in which I participated. These issues are also reflected in the high levels of dropout and mediocre pass rates at the FET colleges. Some students and lecturers suggested that the “foundations” courses, maths, English and Life Orientation, be dropped since NSC-holders presumably had such skills and needed instead to focus on their occupationally specific coursework.

DHET echoes interviewee concerns about the subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical skills of FET college lecturers. However, at this campus, the issue of lecturer absenteeism appeared to also be a very big challenge. In one of my last interviews, one student notes, “if the lecturer isn’t there how can we learn?” On that same day, the campus manger ran out of a classroom, in which he was teaching to speak to me. He apologized for not returning my several emails and calls, mentioned that it did not reflect his lack of support for my research, but that he had been stressed with never ending issues with lectures. “Even today” he said, “I am teaching a class,” because of a shortage of lecturers due to absenteeism.

Several students agreed that without the bursary, which pays for tuition and provides for a transportation, accommodation and food allowance, they would not be able to study at the FET College. Given this reliance on the bursary, many learners expressed great frustration with the poor administration of the bursary program – with the biggest

critique being the late arrival of the bursary, administrative hassles with securing payment, and non-payment. Other recommendations included requests to simplify the qualification system, support the development of student study groups, address the issue of staff corruption, provide greater support for student job placement, address the issue of pending results, and raise the standard of the curriculum.

At the secondary school, the most frequent recommendations among learners and teachers included interest in improving pedagogy, such as no more chalk and talk and doing something about ineffective teachers (8 learners, 2 teachers), improving safety and security (8 learners, 1 teacher), increasing emphasis on exposure to new types of learning experiences, including extracurricular activities (6 learners, 2 teachers), addressing the issue of insufficient resources (6 learners and 1 teacher) and improving career guidance (2 learners, 2 teachers). Many of the most frequently mentioned issues are elaborated on in earlier chapters. One learner speaks to the intersection of issues of safety and caring at secondary school in offering the following recommendation.

Interviewee: We could change secondary school by making it lovable and enjoyable. Everybody when thinking about going to secondary school will be glad because s/he will know that secondary school is a place where I learn more about my future and other things that could give them bright future. There are so many things that they could change but I cannot tell right now.

Interviewer: So is it maybe it could be made to be more enjoyable and lovable than it is now?

Interviewee 1: Well right now it is enjoyable and lovable but not that much. When I was doing Grade 7 when I would think about going to secondary school I think I would just end here not to go to secondary school. Everybody would just say secondary school it's tough, yes it's tough. (SS Learner 5)

The learner goes on to recommend that an atmosphere of bullying and the presence of older learners, who disrupt class and smoke on campus, lead her to recommend sending older learners away from secondary school and to adult basic education and training centers.

On the issues of exposure and learning experiences – most learners appeared to be in agreement that “sitting in the same yard, the same class everyday” (SS Learner 1)

where all you did was “concentrate on books all the time” (SS Learner 5) made school uninteresting and stressful (SS learners 3 and 4). Several learners offered ideas which if implemented would “make secondary school more fun” and would make learners “more inspired” to attend secondary school (SS Learners 5). Ideas included introduction of sports (cricket, rugby, gymnastics) and extracurricular activities (e.g., chess and debate), increased access to technology, computers and the internet, use of videos and animations in class. Teachers (and FET College lecturers) generally agree with this assessment. One teacher agrees of the importance to “make learning interesting for these students not just to look at books every day. Today they come, Tuesday we say from 2 – 4:30 its sports day, they come they know its sports day. Let’s have them enjoy coming to school and prioritize extra-curricular activities” (SS Teacher 2).

Teachers I interviewed were tough on their peers, with one suggesting that unqualified teachers be fired. Others implied that too many teachers, who lacked the passion, were attracted to the profession. They suggested “we should get the best of the best, only those who want to. It should be a tough degree to do, I know some people will run away from it, but if we pay them enough it will attract others” (SS Teacher 4). Other interviewees recommended that there be a greater emphasis on practical subjects and that DBE should stop changing the curriculum and simply focus on effectively implementing CAPS, that efforts should be made to beautify the school, that learners should be allowed to choose their own subject areas, that the school should have a stronger emphasis on academic discipline, and that the school should have a weekly assembly for all learners.

Chapter 11: A grassroots critique of the skills discourse

Grassroots perspectives on the skills discourse

This chapter identifies and reflects on interviewees' perspectives on the skills discourse. Earlier chapters discussed some of the developmental debates related to human capital formation and skills development approaches. There are many robust critiques of human capital and productivist education discourses globally and in South Africa in peer-reviewed literature (Vally & Motala, 2014), as well as several studies which show local resistance to and transformation of global policies (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Kendall, 2007). In this research I sought to elicit grassroots perspectives on the skills discourse. In my interviews, often the question came out as, “government says that if we have more people coming to FET colleges, we will address these bigger issues of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Are they putting too much pressure on FET colleges when they say that?” I do not present interviewees as experts in economics or social theory. However, they are experts on their own lived experiences. These experiences include grappling with issues of, and relationships between, education poverty and unemployment in their own communities. My goal in asking interviewees to “talk back” to discourse is to include their voices and perspectives in the policy discourse.⁸⁵

This chapter is organized as follows. I start by discussing interviewees' critiques of the discourse. I follow by discussing areas where interviewees agree with the discourse. I find that their answers can be organized along a structure-agency continuum. Many interviewees provided a structural analysis of the economy and society to provide a critique of the skills discourse. However, a near similar number spoke to the importance of individual agency, provided a moralistic narrative to explain the persistence of poverty and unemployment, or remained focused on their individual case. After discussing areas of critique and alignment, I discuss some of the difficulties interviewees had in articulating ideas outside the dominant construction. For example, some secondary school teachers argued that since many secondary school learners wouldn't go to university, then secondary school could be reformed to provide employability skills. These data point to the influence of the two paths model (school is for university or

⁸⁵ This approach is identical to a recent study funded by the DHET, the Emerging Voices 2 project.

employment preparation) in constraining the conceptualizations of secondary education. In the final section, I provide some examples of alternative developmental narratives which rupture and transform the “skills for jobs” narrative.

Critiques

Most FET College interviewees identified the importance of skills development, in generic terms, and agreed with DHET efforts to increase enrollment in FET colleges. However, as we peeled back the layers of the skills discourse, FET College learners and lecturers often spoke directly to the assumptions embedded in the dominant discourse. Half of FET College interviewees disagreed with the statement that education can solve the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality. In responding to the question about the triple challenge, most NCV interviewees spoke directly to issues of unemployment (as opposed to poverty or inequality) with many arguing that education alone is an insufficient response to South Africa’s unemployment crisis.

Structural constraints to job creation

Many interviewees spoke to the dissonance at the heart of the skills discourse: they question whether supply side skills development will solve the triple challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment. FET College learners and lecturers, secondary school teachers and policymakers speak directly to this dissonance noting the high levels of unemployment, ongoing retrenchments at factories, and the failure of government to create jobs.

Many NCV interviewees argued that from a structural perspective, the number of jobs available was insufficient to absorb the number of willing workers. Some NCV learners added that de-industrialization and mass retrenchments contributed to job loss in their community. Nearly half of the NCV interviewees interviewed argued that the government should create jobs or that it was not doing enough to create sufficient numbers of jobs. It is not surprising that FET College students were most keen in talking about unemployment and getting a job compared to NSC learners. NCV learners are generally several years older and with age, may have assumed more adult, including income generating, responsibilities. The two exchanges below illustrate the structural perspective of NCV learners critical of the skills discourse.

Interviewee: Unemployment? What do they mean because they [government] are the ones who are supposed to create those jobs. Guess what? Let's speak about NATED, neh? Same applies to NCV, these thing are the same thing. Students do their N1, 2, 3 up to [N] 6. They finish, they stay home. They go to the industry they are told you don't have practicals. How many artisans are there in a mine? I don't know I'm just asking you.

Interviewer: In a mine?

Interviewee: Just in a mine.

Interviewer: I don't know but I will have to think there are just so many mines, I'm just guessing, I'm not a professional. Maybe let's just guess there are 1000 artisans.

Interviewee: 1000? How many students do they think they graduate today here in South Africa?

Interviewer: In mining, maybe twenty or thirty thousand?

Interviewee: No I'm just saying at an institution, maybe at a college or varsity. How many?

Interviewer: I think over 1.4 million people enrolled in FET colleges and varsities. Let's say maybe 20% graduate, let's say maybe 200,000 or 250,000 are graduating.

Interviewee: So we all have this mind, I'm sure every student they all have it. We have this mind that sometimes maybe we won't get jobs. That's something that we have in mind that look we just go there and try. There are so many students that, you come across a lady or someone working at Shoprite. That particular person is at Shoprite and you wouldn't know why. Because in life we believe that God chosen us into many parts, you can go to the, you can study whatever you are studying but at the end of the day they know that this ... so according to me when they [government] say they will create jobs I don't understand because we all,, always are doubts that *from the many South Africans who graduate few will get jobs, many will not.* [emphasis mine] Few will get jobs. ...It's like that when it comes to unemployment. Cause in the media at times we are told 'what what'⁸⁶ is retrenching, 50,000 workers are being fired' so it's like that, we have that thing that simply mines when they [workers] fire maybe they are not hiring next time. Maybe I'll be the victim there. (FETC Student 3)⁸⁷

⁸⁶ "what what" here is slang, a generic term for a company. Like, "company x"

⁸⁷ During period of many strikes. Including a strike by NUMSA/AMCU, during which workers strike for higher wages and the platinum company indicated that it would increasingly mechanize mining.

Another NCV student notes,

What the government is saying now, they are not actually telling us about the real thing, they say go to FET so that you can get work. Now for me I take it that once I finish my FET, obviously I'm gonna get a job of which is not true; it's not necessarily true. What they are trying to say is go to an FET, get a qualification, to *at least get something to get you off the street* [emphasis mine] but now they are putting it as if you get to FET, get your certificate and then you get a job. Now if you don't get a job you will say this thing is not working, this FET is not doing anything to get us jobs, these courses I did them for nothing. ... because you must have a little bit of qualification to get into a work. Maybe you can get to a work as a cleaner, get your qualification there as a cleaner and do your job as a cleaner. As you clean there you study further so that you get more qualification so that you get promoted. So yeah it puts a lot of pressure on the FETs that most learners do come to college and get their courses done and afterwards they do not get jobs. (FETC Student 2)

As indicated above (and in the quote below) education (or, in fact, the qualification) is largely valued in terms of it leading to a job, even though learners are aware that a qualification alone is no guarantee of a job. One learner identifies the role of both education and government policy noting,

We need more education and we need more jobs, it's fifty-fifty. We need to create more jobs. We can study, study, study, but if there are no more jobs, we are not going anywhere. If we study for three years and we don't get a job, it's the same as if we are staying at home. Yes you have a qualification, but you are not working. It's the same as if you never went. (FETC Student 9)

The student continues, and in talking about these issues, points to some of the complexities learners and educators express as they think within and beyond the skills dominant discourse. Here the government is tasked with creating jobs for learners, but this task is large given the number of learners enrolled in FET colleges.

...About the NCV, it's jobs, jobs, jobs. We need to create more jobs for students. We have nine provinces, ne [right] and eight to nine colleges per province, and four to five campuses for each college. When these students finish studying, where are they going? At [name of FET College], they have 5 campuses and NCV students at each campus. They must create too many [a large number of] jobs for students of NCV. (FETC Student 9)

Here the FET College students are puncturing the "scarce skills" discourse. DHET (2014) has made addressing "scarce skills" a centerpiece of its policy agenda and highlights the scarcity of skills in several different engineering professions. Initiatives

like the DHET led “decade of the artisan” speak of the shortage of 40,000 artisans in South Africa. Is this scarcity real? According to post-school education data, in 2011, public universities enrolled over 250,000 students, and graduated over 46,000 students, in Science, Engineering and Technology courses. In the same year, public FET colleges enrolled 27,000 students in Report 191 Engineering Studies and nearly 7,000 students in Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology occupational programs. Not to be left behind, merSETA, the manufacturing and engineering SETA, enrolled over 6,000 individuals, and produced over 4,000 graduates in its Learnership and Skills Programs. In the same year, over 100,000 NCV learners were enrolled, many of them in engineering studies courses, in public FET colleges (DHET, 2013). Can industry absorb all these graduates?

While a majority of NSC learners agreed that education can help solve the problem of unemployment, they also offered perspectives which could rupture this view: that education was insufficient for job creation, that many people had useful skills, but no qualification, and that there were high levels of graduate unemployment. One notes:

No. There are people who are educated who are not employed. The government is not doing what it is supposed to be doing. The government is supposed to be creating jobs. There are many matriculants who go to tertiary and get a degree and then are just staying at home because they don't have a job. (SS Learner 3)

While most FET College lecturers and NSC teachers struggled with the skills discourse (agreeing in some areas and disagreeing on others), one NSC teacher was quite critical. He argues,

The policy is formulated by people up there and they don't know what is happening on the ground...Most of the graduates right now they are sitting with their certificates but they are educated. So what are we saying? Is the work equation working? Because we are now going back to crime actually? Because if you don't find a job the only resource that you are left with is to go and rob something. So are we really attacking the problem? Are we really saying education is the answer to everything? ... I'm not totally refusing the issue of basic education. Education is important but we are not saying it does solve everything. It doesn't solve everything. (SS Teacher 2)

The same teacher also spent time working at a local FET College, and while he values the practical experience offered by FET colleges he also argues that supply-side skills development will not produce employment. He says,

FETs are more on the hands on, on what you are going to do, which is a good thing. My main worry is it comes back to the question that you asked me; a lot is being invested in education, is it a problem solver for everything? ...they [FET colleges] are understaffed most of them.

...what I've realized is that they are after money, they are after these resources. If you look at what they are teaching these kids, they don't know. They [students] think they are going to college, for them to go from the locations [townships] to those colleges they think it's an achievement only to find out that what they are learning there is nothing. You find that a teacher doesn't turn up for a week, but we are saying it was a good idea for the government to build those FET colleges and as many as they are, they are producing student graduates every year and these graduates are jobless. Where are they going to work? That's the question. Everyone in town is saying okay we have these people who are educated but where are they going to work? We are talking about a country that is populated with a lot of people. South Africa in the new America in Africa: every African comes to South Africa. (SS Teacher 2)

Later on, the teacher, who is originally from Zimbabwe, also speaks to the influence of immigration on unemployment. His comment raise a number of issues identified by interviewees: the influence of urbanization and migration on employment, critiques of the quality of FET colleges, the high level of demand for further education, the utility of practical experience, the high level of graduate unemployment, and the persistent hope that education will solve broader social issues.

The following exchange between two NSC learners shows some of the back and forth between structure and agency perspectives.

Interviewee 1: With education you know that you have all that is needed to solve these problems. ...With information and education you can reduce unemployment. If I became a successful business woman I can employ more and more people and employment will reduce poverty.

...

Interviewee 1: Ya like education many people do not have jobs. Let me make an example of science people. More science people are sitting at home I don't know why. They kept studying and studying like they attended school [tertiary] for 7 years but right now they are sitting at home. I don't know why. Maybe they cannot afford their education anymore but the best option for them is to take NASFAS [the national financial aid scheme]. I don't know why they are sitting at home.

Interviewer: I don't know what you would say? [directed to interviewee #2]

Interviewee 2: I don't think people are taking education seriously like without education you can go further more far but they are not taking education seriously. Most... learners at university when they have completed their matric they go to university and at university there is a lot of peer pressure and obstacles that you come across and they drop out. That is why we have a lot of unemployment and poverty. We are seeing it this high because most of our learners here are not taking education seriously like this money of grant they really depend on it. [Here the learner is alluding to reliance on government assistance, the child support grant]

Interviewee 2: The other thing that I think makes people who are studying and not have jobs are that businesses, they employ other people [willing to work for lower wages]. If I'm like highly successful and they want me if I say I want my salary to be like this [high] they don't take me they take the other person who can make their business to grow. So that what makes us not have jobs and as you can see most qualified people are the ones who are sitting at home (SS Learner 5 and 6)

As with the teacher, in this exchange learners speak to several issues: graduate unemployment, small businesses which create jobs, high wage expectations (or put another way, a large pool of cheap labor), qualification inflation, concerns of peers who don't take education seriously and who dropout, and social welfare. These grassroots critiques demonstrate the high levels of awareness among many teachers and learners of the complex relationship between education and employment and of the limitations of existing government education and economic policy. I consider identifying these critiques as very important, because they provide a foundation for potential activism, praxis and social change.

Towards a broader, more contextualized, conceptualization of skills

The chapter on political economy emphasizes the importance of “who” defines skills. The dominant skills narrative in South Africa is framed by a vocational or artisanal conceptualization of skills. A recent DHET publication, the “National Scarce Skills List: top 100 occupations in demand” typify this discourse. Here the priorities of capital define the demand for skills. All non-NSC interviewees (NCV learners and teachers and other adult interviewees) appeared to agree, in general terms, with this narrow conceptualization of skills. Interestingly, it was when NSC and NCV learners talked about the purpose of education, or NSC teachers talked about what non-university bound students could do, that a broader conceptualization of skills was articulated. This broader conceptualization emerged when interviewees were more likely (than indicated

in the dominant discourse) to define knowledge and skills in terms of the perceived application or relevance of such to their lives: skills identified included parenting skills, survival skills, skills to work in a caring profession, or income-generating skills. As noted earlier, one teacher said her exposure to home economics in secondary school helped her to generate income through making and selling knit products.

Here, I argue that interviewees are not arguing for specific skills, but rather that they are arguing for *meaningful* education and skills development: education related to their personal and communal context, their history and situation, their interest in self-reliance, making life easier (e.g., through use of computers and cell phone technology), and supporting their families. Balwanz and Hlatshwayo (2014) elaborate on this issue: what makes a skill meaningful? Part of the answer depends on the answers to other questions: Who is using the skill? What makes the skill meaningful to them? At the policy level, however, one gets the sense that the skills discourse is influencing a “more of the same” reform: that supply-side skills development and providing inputs to schools will address the perceived skills development (code for unemployment) challenge in South Africa. Interviewees’ conceptualizations of skill may make some new demands on secondary schools: Can they offer opportunities for learners to explore varied interests? Do the opportunities offered speak to realistic future application by learners? Are schools willing to go out into communities and seek out non-academic skills development opportunities? Or do educators give up on training and skills development and allow skills development policy to focus on opportunities in work-integrated learning, apprenticeships, and informal and casual labor?

Humanistic and holistic perspectives on vocation

Interviewee perspectives identify a glaring omission in the skills discourse: the extent to which jobs and, economic activity in general, reflect the values, passions or interests of workers. Interviewees offered a variety of reasons for their interest in a particular career, type of work, or vocation. Work (or getting a job) was seen as a means to an end (e.g., independence, financial security, escaping poverty, supporting one family, survival); an aspired-to future identity rooted in present knowledge or skill interests (e.g., the learner who wants to be a marine biologist because he loves working with animals, the learner who loves drama and wants to be on television, the learner who realized she

wasn't good at tourism and transitioned to human resources); or as a way to express values or to be socially useful (e.g., the learner who wants to become a nurse based on her interest in caring for others, the learner who wants to be a good parent). Many students who spoke of specific careers offered a holistic conceptualization of vocation. What I mean is that they expressed an interest in vocation that reflected self-knowledge (e.g., I'm interested in this and not that), understood vocation and vocational practice as related to human values (e.g., love, caring, curiosity, integrity), recognized that to be successful in a particular career they required a variety of particular types of knowledge and skill, and expressed awareness that the practice of a vocation was also related to a particular context. Winch (as cited in Allais, 2012) differentiates between different conceptions of vocation – specifically an Anglo and Continental models. The former privileges a “skills quanta” conception of vocation, where vocational competency is ascertained by an individual's demonstration of competency in a certain number of skills. The continental model identifies a more holistic conceptualization of vocation rooted not just in isolated skills, but in history, ethics and social relations particular to that vocation. One interviewee explicitly privileges industry priorities, noting, “we need more welders because South Africa needs more artisans” so that industry does not have to pay so much to import welders (Policy 3).

Agreement with discourse

The problem (and the solution) lies with the individual

Several interviewees considered the “triple challenge” question from an individualistic perspective. While these interviewees generally saw a qualification as a necessary, but insufficient step toward getting a job, they were also more likely to echo the discourse that hard work would lead to a qualification and that the qualification would lead to a job. The persistence of poverty and unemployment were explained by a moral narrative (e.g., not studying hard enough, getting involved in drugs or alcohol), because learners did not take the right subjects or get training in the right field, or because learners did not have the right mindset about getting a job.

One FET College learner is direct about the relationship between education and unemployment, stating, “Yes it [unemployment] will reduce because people that are

uneducated will develop certain skills that will make them get employed in future”

(FETC Learner 7). She continues,

Interviewee: I think the students at FET colleges they should know the purpose of what made them to be there. For them to know exactly what education is.

Interviewer: Could you explain that a little more? Can you say what makes them to be there?

Interviewee: They should be educated not just saying ‘I’m going to school, I’m going to school.’... They should know that at college they teach you success.

Interviewer: When you say they teach you success what do you mean? What is success to you?

Interviewee: They help you with a good future.

...

Interviewee: Yes. And if in future you are focusing on your studies it might bring a good future because there is a reward for that thing which you have done.

Interviewer: And what is the reward?

Interviewee: Like getting a job for that qualification. (FETC Learner 7)

Another student echoes the dominant discourse, and in doing so also echoes the logic of capitalism and apartheid which places a few highly paid workers over an army of unskilled labor.

I think they [DHET] are playing a HUGE role, and you know why I’m saying they are playing a huge role? Because last of last year when I was doing Level 2. I was studying at [name of FET College] there was a program that took kids from home, and it was a learnership program. It took them to varsity, to the college institute, they paid them hostel, they paid their school fees, and they gave them a certain type of trade. ... I think some of them might have been able to find a job because what matters most is having quality on a certain trade, once you have that quality you can do anything because normally in a contract, let me saying you are having a contract, it’s based here. You must have 25 unskilled people; you must have the skilled one. I think if you have the certificate that proves that he has skill, he has skill of that building. You can take him as a skilled worker. (FETC Student 4)

Several teachers and adult policymakers suggest that one of the problems with the match between education and employment is that learners are “taking the wrong subjects.” This explanation echoes the skills mismatch discourse. One teacher notes,

“They are just taking a combination that makes them pass. The combination is not relevant. They are not taking a combination that makes them ready for the job market” (SS Teacher 2). This critique is echoed by some learners who state the reason they are in the sciences is because that is where there are jobs, or because there are no jobs in tourism.

NSC learners and lecturers were more likely to agree with the assumptions of the skills discourse than NCV interviewees, often agreeing that “in most cases, the causes of unemployment, poverty, inequality, unequal distribution of wealth and income, is the lack of education” (SS Learner 2). Some NSC learners and teachers see education as playing a role in changing learners mindsets and helping to break the cycle of poverty: if learners complete their NSC, their mindsets will be changed and that will be more likely to start their own business or take advantage of available opportunities (SS Learner 8 and 12, SS Teacher 1 and 2). These comments identify both the consciousness-raising possibilities of education in an individual, but do not speak to structural constraints. One FET Lecturer noted, “back in our day [during Bantu education] it was become a teacher or a nurse. You are just in a box. They’re doing the same thing today. The learner can’t think outside the box. How can they get a job?” (FET Lecturer 2)

The expectation that we need to change youths’ skillsets and mindsets is a mantra of the skills discourse. The dilemma articulated by several interviewees, sometimes explicitly and sometime tacitly, is that the dominant education and employment regime preferences a “qualifications” mindset in learners. In South Africa, learners seeking qualifications must demonstrate success in a banking-model education system. Reformers and educators may blame youth mindsets, but are themselves perpetuating a model which privileges exam-passing ‘skillsets’ and qualifications focused “mindsets”.

As I was writing up data, I asked myself: what explains the persistence of individual narratives of success? I think it is the power of individual stories and the repeated telling of them. In South Africa, there is no shortage of stories of disadvantaged students and learners, who, after being beaten down in life, access a second-chance educational opportunity, and through that opportunity, create a better life for themselves. I spoke with several learners sharing such stories. After one interview, I was compelled to write my father and share a learners’ inspiring experience: her story of failure, her

“picking herself back up”, her increased confidence, maturity and self-awareness, and her belief in herself and positive future. One of the FET College students I interviewed speaks to this narrative, as well as of her desire to spread the word about the opportunities of FET colleges. When I asked one teacher what keeps her going, she identified a success story of a once struggling student who is now at university. These stories of realized second-chances and paths out of poverty should not be ignored. I think the “second-chance” opportunity provided by the NCV is quite important. However, if we pull back from these individual narratives, we can also acknowledge that creating more equitable paths to existing jobs is not the same as creating new jobs. Vally and Motala (2014) also write about the persistence of highlighting individual success stories in South Africa.

The problem is implementation

The FET College lecturers I interviewed often argue within the dominant discourse, and focus on implementation challenges. One lecturer, noting the high rates of dropout in the NCV, argues that the FET College should focus on implementing the NATED (FET Lecturer 3). Another lecturer offers a broader critique of DHET and its expectations of FET colleges. I ask, “To say we have a problem of poverty, inequality, unemployment; you FET College help us solve that?” The interviewee responds,

For me that is not realistic, neh and my perception in, I don’t know but I think it’s like that in any country, this top bottom approach where somebody, they will just sit and say I want that and that and that. Before I mentioned an issue of resources, we don’t have resources to be confident to say [we’re meeting the mandate of government]. ...So that for me is not realistic... if we are taking grade nines and relating this to a curriculum which you know we expect our country to improve in the area of skills. If can just go to one of our campuses and go into the workshops you would really ask yourself whoever, wherever is sitting there: who has taken this decision to say FETs we expect you to assist us in achieving 1, 2, 3? Are they really aware of the status? And what is it that they are doing in support? Okay we appreciate the fact that they are providing the students with the NSFAS, the bursary, but at the end of the day before they could even send the students to the institutions they should first make sure that are those institutions [are] really conducive to enable us to meet our expectations but that for me really it’s not realistic. (FETC Lecturer 1)

Implementation failure is a pet critique of a school of thought a colleague of mine characterized as the “descriptive institutionalists.”⁸⁸ These are thinkers from NGOs,

⁸⁸ Personal conversation with Siphelo Ngcwangu, a researcher at Wits.

consultancies and think tanks who in general terms argue that if the implementation is fixed (e.g., improve school management, train teachers, “respond” to and partner with industry, control the unions), then some of the economic and social problems that neoliberal and neo-managerial policies are designed to address will be solved. Recent reforms of DHET and DBE, including the recapitalization efforts in technical secondary schools, appear to consonant with a descriptive institutionalist paradigm. A critical social theorist and critical political economist perspective would argue that the descriptive institutionalists under-theorize the complex relationships between education, economy and society and do not sufficiently account for social structures which offer possibilities and limitations on the extent to which desired goals of education can be met through education policy and implementation alone. A further limitation is that descriptive institutionalists do not look inside the “black box” of education, the “what” and “why” of education discussed in chapter nine. Education and knowledge simply “are;” they do not represent social constructions mediated by power relations.

More work experience, please

NCV students and lecturers and most NSC teachers suggested that more skills training and work experience could help youth access jobs. From my literature review, my research on Emerging Voices 2, and in this research, it appears that FET colleges have largely failed to provide relevant work experience for NCV and NATED students. There are several reasons for this failure: industry is not a willing partner, FET colleges are afraid to send “immature” and “unprofessional” learners to local employers, the work experience provided is not relevant to the students’ course of study, and work and internship experiences are seen as exploitative. One obvious challenge is that, with youth unemployment at over 40%, there are simply not a lot of formal employment and internship vacancies. As noted earlier, DHET recognizes this challenge in its own White Paper. One teacher argues for development of learners’ higher level cognitive in secondary school, and then after acknowledging that many learners will not continue to college and may become unemployed, argues for expansion of post-secondary training and apprenticeship programs. He states,

You undergo a training, maybe at a training center or a college or at job like motor mechanic, like working at a garage, working with a professional mechanic and then you acquire those skills and then ultimately you become a motor

mechanic. So that is in most cases, that's how many of the black people acquired the skills. Like building skills, they acquire skills by working with the contractors there building houses and then that is how we learn, maybe plastering and so on and so on.

They learn by doing, by looking at you whilst you are building and then ultimately they acquire those skills. Yeah, but unemployment, most of the people who are unemployed it's either they lack basic training in particular field of career, you see. ...Like plastering, building and then contractors, welding, carpentry and then plumbing, you see. But we acquire those skills by doing them, by working with the contractors and do then learn that way.

And then, if you don't have those skills, then you're not going to easily be employed, unless you're prepared to start at the ground. Starting at the ground means cheap labor, you're used as cheap labor because if you're prepared to earn very little then until you have acquired the skill, until you are so skillful that you can even write an exam maybe and then acquire some certificates but it takes some years before you can get to that level, you see. (SS Teacher 1)

In a separate interview, an NCV civil engineering student indicated that many of her peers leave the FET College after successfully completing their level 2 practical exams (during which students must demonstrate construction skills such as building a truss) because they are able to transition to semi-skilled work in construction.

In both cases, the practical experience or work experience is identified as sufficient for meeting the interest identified by the learner. In fact, as discussed in Klees (2014), here the work experience may replace the need for industry-specific education as the former may be more relevant for accessing certain types of jobs. Again, however, it is not education, training or apprenticeship which creates the job, but rather, provides access to it. Importantly, the secondary school teacher also identifies issues which deter many youth from seeking out artisanal jobs: years of low pay, long days of potentially harmful physical labor, and potential exploitation.

The struggle to think outside dominant constructions

The influence of the skills discourse and of the dominant construction of secondary education – that it is to provide a path to either further education or into the labor market – is evident in nearly all interviews. Many FET College lecturers and NSC teachers struggled to explain the persistence of unemployment and inequality in South Africa. This is perhaps to be expected: there are varied and highly contested explanations

for the persistence of the poverty, inequality and unemployment. Drawing on their own experiences, nearly all interviewees agreed that “a matric [a level 4 qualification] is not enough” to get a job and that the majority of secondary school leavers would not gain access to university. This perspective reflects the dominant perspective in South African policy circles and in the media. Arguing from within the dominant discourse, the only answer available to many interviewees was to encourage more for skills development.

One secondary school teacher argues that secondary schools need to start thinking about employability and skills development since “the students we find [at this secondary school], they are not the varsity type” (SS Teacher 3). Given limited space in universities, many interviewees argued that secondary school (or post-secondary training) should provide skills development that would allow learners to learn a trade, become “employable,” “generate income,” or become “self-employable.” Consistent with the dominant discourse, NSC teachers’ discussion on “skills” discussion often became focused on “technical” skills. In other parts of the interviews, youth and adult interviewees spoke of the importance of foundational skills (e.g., English and mathematics), cognitive skills (e.g., thinking and problem solving) and non-cognitive skills (e.g., communication, working well with others). However, when talking specifically about “skills,” interviewees spoke of welding, auto mechanics, knitting, plaiting, and so on. Many adult interviewees framed their discussion on skills as a critique of the narrow, academic, construction of secondary education. According to them, this narrow academic construction was broadened by bringing in ideas from the skills discourse which suggested that secondary education include more vocationally oriented subjects. As noted earlier, two DBE staff members (at senior and mid-level positions) argue for vocationally-related subject diversification in secondary schools and DBE appears ready to begin introducing NCV-like courses of study in technical secondary schools. NSC learners interviewed, however, appear to have other ideas. The vast majority of NSC learners enroll in learning areas geared toward university preparation as opposed to those providing technical skills and designed to support graduates transition to the workforce. Their identification with further study is associated with better paying jobs and more fulfilling futures.

Alternative development narratives

While I did not ask interviewees to provide alternative development narratives, many offered narratives which valued other types of development and other strategies for breaking the cycle of poverty. These alternative narratives identify the potential to create a better society through community development and social programs, demonstrate the importance of family support structures, and argue for promoting a decent work agenda.

Community development and social programs

Several NSC and NCV learners suggested that greater priority be given to social and community development in their communities. Often these statements are grounded in a concern about the level of violence, drug-use and criminality in the community, and suggest that an education oriented toward community development can help to address such problems. One FET College student explicitly prioritizes social development over economic development, stating,

I think it [the purpose of education] has to be more on social development than economic because for instance now we have a lot of crime in the country, if a child is being taught from the early age that crime is not, that do not do crime. They grow with that thing and tend to be a better person in society. So building more schools as a supporting structure for social development I think is the main reason for the schools. ... we gonna have the good social structure we gonna have a good society and obviously we gonna have good economics because we will be having people who are responsible, people who have skills, people who have education, people who are willing to learn to improve the economy because society improves the economy for now I think 60% of the youth is unemployed and what do they do-they turn to crime. Now we are not gonna have a good economy if we have crime because its scares away the investors. Nobody will want to invest in something that is gonna get broken into or stolen so I think if we can focus more on the social part of it than the economy, I think . Yeah.
(FETC Student 2)

Another FET College student shares this assessment, noting

The community should have different programmes like (inaudible) they should have a sports area where youth should play soccer in order to avoid drugs and certain things like crime. So if the community act on those things, it will help. It will be a good community, with a good youth that will have a good future in the next generation. (FETC Student 7)

These sentiments are echoed by NSC learners who state that they are scared for their safety and identify locations where positive youth development can take place, but which

are currently being used by youth doing drugs. NSC teachers echo this concern, but appear overwhelmed by the number of challenges they face. The following exchange shares one teacher's take on the many social development challenges facing the community.

Interviewee: Then the community, the people in the community are protesting then the school is disturbed because the learners are also part of the community. And there is no way that the community can do a protest and stop buses and taxis and then learners to go to school. So those are some of the activities that influences negatively the performance of learners at school

Interviewer: And can schools do anything about this? Like...maybe they can't stop drugs and they can't stop xenophobia, but is there role or is there anything you think the school can do to try to stop this?

Interviewee: I think we involve police specialists to come to address the learners about drugs and the danger there of, you see.

Interviewee: How dangerous, and to explain to them how dangerous drugs can be to them and to their lives. Drugs and alcohol abuse, learn how to report such incidents.

Interviewer: Ok.

Interviewee: They are encouraged to report any type of drug and alcohol abuse...

Interviewer: Yeah...

Interviewee: And then child molestation, it's also being encouraged to report.

Interviewer: Ok.

Interviewee: So, using social workers, then also making use of inviting specialists from the police services. They come and then they address learners in respective classes and then that also assists in minimizing the use of drugs, you see.

Interviewer: Ok.

Interviewee: But at a random search, sometimes we call them they will come and search classes and then sometimes we invite parents. In our parents' meeting then we also include topics like drugs and alcohol among the youth.

Interviewer: Ok.

Interviewee: Yeah. (SS Teacher 1)

Family support

The same secondary school teacher speaks of education as breaking the “vicious cycle of parent-child, child, child-parent” and refers to the importance of family structures in helping youth escape the cycle of poverty. He notes,

And then, you know, our families...I’m telling you this because it’s important. Our families, our...the way I’ve been brought up, I am brought up in the manner that after completing my studies I must go and help my other younger brothers, you see. That is how we go up. And that is how we are brought up by our parents. After completing Matric I went to the College. And then after completing my teaching Diploma I assisted my younger brothers to go through...I pay for everything. I buy them clothes, I buy...I pay for their learning and then the other one got out, and then the other one got out and then the other one got out and then they also go back and assist our mothers and fathers, you see.

...when I started working, I was working for my parents. ...[My] salary will go straight home and then they will do exactly what they want about my salary until the other one is able to get a job and then come and assist then I will be relieved in a way. The elder son will be relieved, then second born will assist until he’s been relieved by the third born. That is how we were brought up. (SS Teacher 1).

Provide decent work

Notably, the dominant perspective doesn’t question the predominant logic of the labor market in South Africa where the majority of jobs are low paying, insecure and offer poor working conditions and the “inhumane socio-economic environment” into which youth enter following completion of schooling. Nor does it question the extent to which education reinforces class hierarchies and inequalities or focus on competition for limited tertiary spaces and decent jobs. Some learners indicate that many jobs are low paying, insecure, have poor conditions of work, have low status, or do not align with their interests. While critics may suggest that some students are “marking-time” in post-schooling programs, or that expansion of post-school education is essentially “warehousing youth”, youth may be making a rational choice: choosing to remain in education with the chance of being able to access a better job, as opposed to volunteering (in the hope of getting a job) or trying to get a job, which for several reasons, may be undesirable or unsatisfying.

Chapter 12: A grassroots critique of the “two paths” model

The socially constructed path

In the introduction, and in later chapters, I make reference to the social construction of secondary education. By this I mean that secondary education has become largely defined by and valued for its contributions to two perceived purposes – preparing youth for university education and preparing youth for entry into the world of work. An important part of this construction is the influence of high stakes leaving exams – which mediate learners’ access to future opportunities – including highly sought after university spaces. Nearly all interviewees explicitly recognized the importance of securing a level 4 qualification (a NSC or an NCV) to access further education and desired jobs. The perceived importance of securing a level 4 qualification reflects several issues in South Africa including increased competition for university spaces, limited access to formal sector jobs and a changing economy where the share of unskilled and semi-skilled labor in the workforce is declining. Put another way: increased educational attainment is seen as a means to accessing limited opportunities for improving one’s life. The phenomena of using increased qualification to better compete for scarce jobs has been identified by a number of researchers and theorists, who identify this phenomenon as the “diploma disease” (Dore, 1976), “credentialism” (Stromquist, 2002), and “qualification inflation” (Collins, 2014). One FET student summarizes the issue, stating that “without school [a qualification] you cannot work” (FET Student 9).

The structure of the “path” and the phenomenon of “qualification inflation” are both influenced by the skills discourse. In academic secondary education, the skills discourse contributes to a narrow understanding of quality (i.e., improving NSC pass rates) and argues in favor of increasing enrollment and performance in STEM fields. DBE’s increased focus on assessment and global competitiveness echo global trends and discourses on assessment (Benveniste, 2002). As indicated in earlier chapters, the skills discourse, the increased emphasis on testing and competition for tertiary spaces and jobs influence an instrumentalized and narrow conceptualization of the purpose of secondary education. Nearly all interviewees identify significant limitations with the current construction of secondary education. The previous chapter presented research findings

related to the skills discourse. This chapter shares research findings related to constructions of “purpose.”

Grassroots perspectives and experiences

Multiple, co-existing purposes

The learners, teachers, and other adults I interviewed speak to multiple, coexisting purposes for secondary education. Nearly all learners see education as a means to helping them develop and realize their dreams. Learners’ dreams are varied and social structures appear to influence learners’ construction of dreams and their understandings of what education and training is required for them to realize their dreams. Put another way, interviewees accommodate both instrumental and existential purposes for education insofar as education can help learners reach toward a desired future.

Nearly all NSC learners I interviewed saw a level 4 qualification as a ticket to accessing further education, and later on a job. For NCV learners, the NCV offered a second chance to get back on the education-employment path. University, or post-NCV education, was expressed as important by nearly all NSC learners and NCV students. Learners saw “the path” as leading them toward a bright future, defined by many as financial security (or escaping poverty), independence, and having a job or career they found interesting. It’s worth remembering that “learning to pass” is also a skill: one which is important for learners if they are to make progress toward existential objectives. This instrumental construction aligns with Wedekind’s schema (2013) identifying the purposes of the NSC from the perspective of different stakeholders. For many learners, an important characteristic of a “bright future” or being “successful” includes not being poor. One learner notes, “I’m going to school only to have a better life someday, not because I like it” (SS Learner 13). Learners also express existential purposes for education. Learners sought to “follow their dreams” and do something they loved – often expressed in terms of a particular vocation and career. For NSC learners, secondary school was a place for them to learn about themselves, to explore things that were meaningful to them, to be exposed to new experiences, and to receive guidance about the future. For some, school also offered a potentially safe and positive space, away from social ills prevalent in the school community.

Adult interviewees emphasized the importance of holistic development and the importance of helping learners “become who they are.” Some interviewees speak to an interest in education for the sake of learning (e.g., “why does a tornado have such power?”) or because they want to express values that are important to them such as taking care of others or giving back to the community. Other interviewees see education as a process that helps learners change their mentalities about who they are or think about the person they want to become. Here, lecturers speak to how social norms can contribute to the oppression of learners who are not academically strong, learners who do not speak English well, and learners who come from a disadvantaged or marginalized background. Education can also be a means for liberation, self-assertion, and dignity; a means for defining yourself as opposed to letting others define you. We’ll come back to this point in the final chapter. As noted in the previous chapter, when most interviewees spoke of skills, they spoke in terms of meaningful learning.

A desire for holistic development

The majority of research interviewees spoke to an interest in “holistic” development. When confronted with the cards identifying various types of learning teachers, lecturers, and other adult interviewees often argued in favor of the importance of “all types of learning.” These types of learning included learning related to values, social skills, critical thinking and problem-solving, self-knowledge, taking initiative, the community and other learners, different subjects and occupational areas, skills to get a job, and extra-curricular activities. NSC learners attached great importance to learning about yourself, learning about the community and other learners, and values while NCV learners were much more focused on job-specific development.

Learners and teachers in secondary school express concern of the narrowness of their education and call out an educational experience which places greater emphasis on education as a process of exposure to new knowledge, new experiences, and new people; school as a site where learning about yourself and peer learning is valued; and knowledge as something that is related to learners’ personal experiences and contexts. Several lecturers and some learners recognize the role of failure in helping learners learn about themselves and their interests and in helping learners think about their future. Critiquing the current system, one learner notes, that “a lot of people study something not in line

with who they are” (SS Learner 12). The majority of students and learners expressed a desire for more varied learning experiences, more practical activities, more exposure to the world (e.g., field-trips), and more extra-curricular activities. NSC teachers and NCV lecturers echoed these remarks. NCV learners were especially vocal about the importance of the practical learning offered by the FET College and significantly contrasted it with their theory-only instruction at secondary school.

Education and knowledge: narrow conceptions, narrow practices

While most interviewees expressed “holistic” development preferences, they also identified that secondary schools promote a narrow conceptualization and practice of education. Several factors appear to influence the narrow conceptualizations of education and knowledge and narrow educational practices. Factors include: pressure to perform well on the NSC, limited university spaces, the practice of learning areas, limited teaching and learning materials, and the fact that many learners entering Grade 10 were already “behind” and that Grades 10-12 were focused on catching up. From the perspective of parents, learners, provincial politicians, DBE headquarters, provincial and district offices, the media, and the general public, the shorthand measure for secondary school performance, is a schools’ NSC pass rate. Provincial politicians and DBE offices place great pressure on schools to meet a certain NSC pass rate by emphasizing competition with other provinces. Matric focus means that in secondary school, the knowledge which is “valued” is that included on the NSC exam.

Competition for scarce university spaces and scarce formal sector jobs lead many learners to choose to focus on studying the sciences. From the perspectives of learners, a background in the sciences will make their university applications more competitive. Learners also believe that more jobs are available in the sciences. That many learners choose the sciences (or alternatively, the business studies) learning stream significantly narrows scope of learning experiences to which secondary school learners are exposed. In interviews, secondary school learners and teachers speak to the several aspects of this narrowed learning experience: picking learning areas in Grade 10, focusing on learning information which is expected to be on exams, going to afternoon and weekend classes, spending large amounts of time of practice exams and engaging in the Cram-Pass-Forget study method. Limited resources for practical, lab-based learning, and the pervasiveness

of teacher-centered methods of pedagogy further narrow students' learning experiences and understandings of knowledge construction.

In the FET College, learners were focused on getting a qualification which they describe as important to helping them access further education, and eventually a job. Notably, some of the understandings of "education" and "knowledge" learned in secondary school appeared to stay with some NCV learners. A few NCV learners expressed dismay with the FET course "New Ventures Creation" which was graded partially through exams including "scenario" questions. One learner notes,

Most of the time they're using the style of scenario. You are reading these case studies. ... [other learners] don't like the questions because it's not like they can answer 1, 2, 3. ... The problem [for them] is the scenario. New Ventures is not Office Practice or Business Practice where they [the tests] ask you, give us five pieces of office equipment. In Business Practices the tests are mixed: some are multiple choice, some are true false, some are columns, then you get to question 4 and that is the scenario. [In New Ventures all questions are scenarios]. (FETC Learner 9)

NSC and NCV learners appear to have been coached to become comfortable with learning and repeating factual knowledge: according to some NCV students, many NCV learners do not like responding to questions with ambiguous answers. In both the NSC and the NCV, the importance of knowledge is determined by powers external to the learner and often learners see the process of learning as that of getting the right answer to go on to the next level of education – nothing more.

For both the NSC and the NCV, the dominant discourse speaks of education often as a technocratic, individualistic, and decontextualized practice and experience much in line in Freire's description of the banking model of education (Freire, 2003). Most interviewees recognize that academic success is measured in "banking" model terms: success on an exam covering a narrow domain of knowledge in a narrow number of subjects. The narrow practices of education and schooling may subtly, or not so subtly, reinforce particular understandings of knowledge.

What are the implications? In this research we see that many learners preference "learning to pass" over "learning to understand." The experience of schooling for many learners perpetuates an understanding of education as a process of transmitting decontextualized knowledge. Decontextualized knowledge is seen as valueless, or valued

only to the extent to which it contributes to learners' or schools' instrumental goals. The test focus of schooling marginalizes other forms of learning, knowledge, and skills development, many of which may be perceived of as valuable, but which are difficult to measure. Taking these concerns together, it is not surprising that teachers have to “keep reminding them [students] why they’re here [in school]” (SS Teacher 2). The pernicious influence of the above constructions of education, knowledge, and learning most significantly, and negatively, affects learners in inadequately resourced township schools, who often start out the furthest behind, have the poorest facilities and weakest teachers, and come from the most challenging social and home environments.

A sidebar on English language, written expression and developing a voice

During the period of my dissertation research, I also worked as a researcher on the Emerging Voices 2 project. The purpose of the project was to work with individuals and education institutions in a poor and working class communities to re-imagine post school education.

One of the research activities involved working with a Youth Research Learning and Advocacy team comprised of unemployed youth in the community. The YRLA met regularly and helped to conduct EV2 research. In turn, researchers from the University of Johannesburg provided writing coaching to YRLA team members. For all YRLA members, English was a second or third language. Many YRLA members struggled with writing in English.

One day, as we were driving home from the research site, the writing coach and I began talking about YRLA writing products. At the time, YRLA members had been producing several types of writing: personal biographies, reflections based on attendance at EV2 events and essays on EV2 themes and issues.

In the first drafts we were receiving, the writing often came across as stilted and overly formalized. The writing appeared to focus on using large words, grand concepts and generic descriptions of particular issues. For example, a piece of writing may identify unemployment as a scourge and then proceed to list causes and results of unemployment. This when a writing piece was supposed to speak to community-specific issues and challenges.

We contrasted these pieces of writing with the quite lively and contextually rich conversations we had with the YRLA on the same topic. One day a YRLA member offered a hilarious and withering imitation of a government representative “going through the motions” of engaging the community re: a particular, and particularly un-substantive, initiative related reducing unemployment.

In contrasting the two experiences, we got the sense that the first drafts we received reflected the type of writing encouraged in some secondary schools: formal, stilted English; devoid of voice and reductionist. Expression through writing also speaks to epistemological issues: to our youth researchers, *What is evidence? What counts as knowledge? Who can be a knower?*

Lived experiences of marginalization, inequality, and daily struggle

Learners’ home backgrounds and community environment significantly influence the school environment and as well as learners’ relation to, retention in and success in school. Nearly half of FET College and secondary school learners interviewed indicated

that they came from homes where one or both parents were absent, nearly all FET College learners relied on a bursary to be able to attend college, both the secondary school and the FET College faced shortages of learning materials and both institutions were located in communities where issues of violence, crime, drugs alcohol, and social unrest (e.g., service delivery protests) were prevalent and which had high levels of migration (from other provinces) and immigration (which meant school catered to a highly diverse populations of learners with different home languages). Pregnancy was identified as a significant challenge facing female learners in secondary school. The problems of the community appeared to significantly impact the schools' social environment. Not mentioned by interviewees, but evidenced in the community are the ongoing effects of the HIV crisis, the large number of orphans, the effects of deindustrialization on the local economy, and the lingering effects of forced relocation and migrant labor on families. For three months the secondary school suffered from no electricity while in the same year textbooks and other learning materials at the FET College arrived three months late. One teacher offers a case in point, where the effects of poverty and living in a disadvantaged community come into conflict with teachers' efforts to maintain a standard of excellence.

Here's a learner. Instead of wearing black shoes, he's wearing takkies [tennis shoes]. If you chase him back home, because he is irresponsible, he did not polish the shoes. He did not make sure that the shirt is ironed and doesn't wear a proper uniform. If you chase him you're violating the constitution of the country because he has the right to education, you see. But the right to education must go along with responsibility. He must be responsible for his act of not wearing proper uniform, you see. So these are some of the problems that we are experiencing. Say for example, this morning there was an electrical cut off in [names a location] ...and then the learners could not come on time....Do you want to say if there's an electrical cut off in this area and then the learners who are in this area they are on time, these that are in this area are not on time. That is democracy, and then what are you going to do? Are you going to teach or are going to wait for the latecomers to come and then. (Secondary School Teacher 1)

One senior policy maker, speaking to the importance of parental involvement, characterizes the problem as, "when the kids want your support you are not there maybe because you are somewhere in Europe" (Policy 1). This comment exemplifies the disconnect between education policy and the lived experiences of most learners. Are parents not involved because they're in Europe? Here is what learners say: "my mom

died and my dad is not responsible. I live with my grandmother here” (FETC Learner 8). Or, “my dad lives at Witbank [far from the learner] because he works there in a mine” (SS Learner 2). These lived experiences may be one of the reasons that learners want mentors. A mentor “would know the challenges that they have gone through and then they will say ‘look out for those points so that you do not go to the same’” (SS Learner 12).

These constellations of disadvantage not only exacerbate the comparative disadvantage facing already marginalized youth but also psychologically affect learners by diminishing their self-confidence and their capability to aspire (DBE, 2011; Powell, 2013). Teacher and learners know they exist in an unequal system; they know that other schools are much better resourced and supported. Several teachers and learners spoke to these issues of learners’ mentalities – how difficulties in education, difficulties at home, and negative peer influences re-enforce the negative self-image and lack of interest in education of some learners. Many FET College lecturers and secondary school teachers appear attuned to these challenge when they speak to their role as parents, psychologists and guidance counselors. Mnqwazi (2014) quotes a youth speaking about the mentality of poverty, noting, “when you have been poor for a long time your ability to think weakens and you end up not even seeing yourself progressing in life.” These concerns are echoed by FET College lecturers and secondary school teachers who note of learners, in the words of one teacher, “the level of their mentality is that they cannot achieve” (FETC Lecturer 2). Importantly, many NCV learners speak to how their agency and aspirations expand when they are offered new opportunities and experiences. The importance of such phenomena are rarely mentioned in the dominant discourses on secondary education and skills.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Global discourses on education and skills generally speak to poverty, inequality and joblessness using the language of neoclassical and neoliberal economics and quantitative statistics. Such perspectives speak to the extent of poverty, unemployment as well other challenges facing households’ health and welfare. Often solutions emerging from these analyses seek to address the above issues using resource transfers such as income grants, school feeding, scholarships, bursaries and the like. While such initiatives have improved the lives of and opportunities for many learners and improved many schools, they remain partially blind to the “lived experiences” and “realities” of learners in poor and working class township communities.

The NCV: a viable second chance

South Africa currently has over 3.4 million youth, one-third of this age group, between the ages of 15-24, who are not in education, employment or training (DHET, 2014). As currently structured, neither universities nor the labor market can be expected to absorb this large number of youth, many of whom are secondary school dropouts. According to NCV students and lecturers interviewed, the NCV provides learners, who are predominantly from disadvantaged backgrounds and who often have few other educational options, with a genuine opportunity for continuing their education and making something of their lives. While there are several issues regarding FET college management and implementation of the NCV program and the “fit” of the NCV into South Africa’s educational system, the NCV appears to be helping some individuals from poor and marginalized backgrounds improve their lives. However, while the NCV appears to be helping individuals, what is much less clear is the extent to which the NCV is creating new jobs.

Education, values, and the community

Learners and educators explicitly and implicitly embed their discussion of education in the language of values. The language of values comes in several forms: learners value self-knowledge, they value safety, they value respectful interactions with teachers, they may value math and practical work (even if they sometimes grumble about it), they value exposure to new things, they recognize the importance of communication and conflict management, and they identify that values are expressed in all domains of life, including thought and action in education, work, and society. Many interviewees identify values enacted in schools (e.g., banking education, exam-focus, the unprofessional conduct of teachers, and the lack of community-building and extra-curricular activities) as operating in conflict to the values which are professed to be important. Learners and educators are decidedly mixed on the issue of whether and to what extent education should support the development of learners’ values and promote democratic participation. Research findings suggest that dominant constructions may also crowd out time devoted to other issues, such as democratic development, community engagement, or discussion on diversity. However, what appears clear from this research is that while South African schools may be separated by class, they remain highly

ethnically and linguistically diverse. Further a large number of schools are located in communities where issues of violence, criminality, and other social challenges trouble the lives of youth. For many schools to not engage on these challenges seems to be a lost opportunity.

While several teachers questioned the “academic discipline” of youth, it is also worth questioning the extent to which the structure and practices of secondary education encourage the development of autonomous, self-directed learners. Or put another way, to what extent does schooling illuminate learners to their intrinsic interests and motivations? To what extent does education encourage learners’ development of responsibility for their own learning path? Later on, NSC dropouts emerge in the NCV program. These learners have come to the conclusion that to move forward in life, education is important. While the agency of learners is expressed in a number of ways, agency does not appear to be explicitly valued or nurtured in the secondary school setting. I provide further discussion on values in the final chapter.

Youth, adolescence, and non-linear paths

Another important issue which emerged in this research is that the secondary education and skills discourse appears blind to social constructions of “youth” as well as to the fact that most secondary school learners are going through adolescence. Secondary education is a crucial stage in each learners’ individual “coming of age” story: their bodies are changing (e.g., one female learner talks about how she wishes she could just stay at home), they continue a process of self-discovery and identity formation mediated through influential peer relationships (e.g., are you in the sciences learning area and going to class on Sunday or are you hanging out with the girls who smoke), they see, learn, and experience new things (e.g., bullying, pregnancy and alcohol), they trouble over their relationships with parents and other adults (e.g., one learner can’t talk to his parents about a romantic relationship, but feels comfortable talking to a teacher), and they dream about the future. The breadth of learners’ dreams is often limited by their lived experiences, and most follow, in general terms and sometimes reluctantly, the path laid out for them in school.

In many countries, the stage of “youth” appears to cover an increasingly longer period of time. Part of this has to do with the social construction of youth: the stage

when you are no longer a child, but not yet considered an adult. How does one differentiate an adult from a youth? Perhaps a youth becomes an adult when he or she: becomes married, becomes a parent, secures a stable job, owns a house, or is seen as taking on “adult” roles and responsibilities in a community. Some of the answers to the questions can be gleaned based on some of the responses offered by NSC and NCV learners about education, work, and society. NSC learners are younger and often less burdened with the expectation of transitioning to adult roles and responsibilities. They are more likely to express varied learning and skills development interests (e.g., learning about yourself, the community, and other learners), interest in exposure to new knowledge and experiences, and a desire for guidance which are suggestive of existential purposes for education.

While NSC learners often came from challenging backgrounds, it appeared that for older NCV learners, the transition to adult responsibilities was becoming more urgent. NCV learners are older. Some have been out of school for some time and have children or other adult, family care, or income generation responsibilities. Adult-hood is breathing down their necks and they feel pressures to get a job. This is to say, the world of adult responsibilities, appears to play a more influential role in how NCV learners think about the future. Of course, the expressed purpose of getting a job is not to serve the interests of capital, but rather to gain independence and financial security, preferably in a job they find interesting. This is not to say that NCV learners had it figured out: several NCV learners simply stated that they knew they needed to do “something” with their lives, in some cases, this “something” was explicitly related to income-generation responsibilities.

Many NCV learners appeared to be in the middle of following a “non-linear” path between youth and adulthood. They followed a winding path between education and work aspirations mediated by poverty, the need to resolve immediate livelihood needs (e.g., food, shelter, health), and family responsibilities (e.g., childcare, elder-care, contributing to family income) among other things (see Balwanz and Hlatshwayo, 2014 and Perold, 2012 for further discussion). Why this difference between NSC and NCV learners? I argue that we are meeting similar people, but at different stages in life, and *that learners’ purposing of education changes as they grow and change and as their relationship with society changes*. This suggests that learners may be more open to

education as an experience of exploration and development of self-knowledge when they are younger. However, older learners’ purposing of education may in part be explained by the non-linear path which they took before enrolling in the NCV.

This section shares research findings related to social constructions of “purpose.” The next section identifies tensions between policy discourse and grassroots perspectives.

Tensions: policy discourses, social constructions, and grassroots perspectives

I argue that findings expressed in this chapter and in the previous chapter represent a tension between different sets of values: the values expressed in the dominant discourse and existing constructions of secondary education and values expressed by interviewees – teachers and learners in historically marginalized communities. Table 26 offers a comparison of the values privileged in the dominant discourse and compares them with values expressed by research participants. This comparison identifies different perspectives on the purpose of education, the reform agenda, the reform process, human capital assumptions and elite constructions, and the relevance, or irrelevance, of community context.

Table 26: Comparing dominant discourse and practice to research findings

Dominant discourse / practice	Research findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Privileges: the interests of capital ▪ Reform is: more access, narrow curriculum, better test results ▪ Reform through: prescriptive, top-down solutions ▪ Argues that: ‘skills create jobs’ and growth and we should continue with ‘two-paths’ model ▪ Is blind to community challenges and the lived experiences of youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Privileges: the interests of people / communities ▪ Reform is: expand opportunities for exploration and holistic development, improve quality ▪ Reform through: increasing space for agency (coupled with expertise) ▪ Argues that: jobs and livelihood creation are complex phenomena and that the elite model produces systemic drop-out, fear, and disillusion ▪ Recognizes the significant impact of community challenges and the lived experiences of youth

I frame the tensions identified in the above table in two ways: the tensions between neoliberal and social justice discourses and the tensions between the socially constructed path (that secondary education prepare learners for university education and the world of work) and grassroots perspective on purpose.

The tension between neoliberal and social justice discourses in education. As noted in Chapter 6, in the early stages of the new democracy, policymakers struggled to craft education policy which accommodated both neoliberal ideology and social justice and transformation goals. Sites of struggle included debates over the secondary school curriculum, definitions of quality, interventions designed to improve the equitable distribution of opportunities and resources, the language of teaching and learning, and efforts to relate skills development priorities to the needs and interests of communities, society, and business. Critics argue that while the ANC has identified the importance of addressing the “triple challenge” of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, in education, the ANC has increasingly adopted a neoliberal policy agenda. Efforts to rapidly expand access to FET colleges, reform curricula in technical secondary schools and the NSC, and improve “quality” in academic secondary schools is based on the contested assumptions embedded in, and preferences privileged by, human capital and productivist paradigms. Reform messages argue for improving the quality of the NSC and NCV, increasing testing and increasing access to university.

As alluded to by Wedekind (2014) in the introduction, and Klees (2014) and Vally and Motala (2014) in Chapter 3, supply-side skills development does not appear to be effecting the social change and transformation argued to be the goal of the dominant discourse. In one youth dialogue at the University of Johannesburg several university students said they were going to do whatever it takes to leave South Africa, stating, “there is no future for us here.” Notably, the dominant discourse ignores the issue of entrenched and unequal distribution of power in society, arguing instead that a technocratic approach to education and skills development can address deep social and economic problems facing South Africa.

The tensions between the socially constructed path and grassroots perspectives. In the introduction, I differentiate between elite and democratic models of secondary

education. An elite model of secondary education privileges the expectations, interests, and goals of a dominant social class: in most countries this means secondary school focuses on preparing learners for university study, which in turn are expected to lead to careers. The elite model is the standard model in nearly all countries in sub-Saharan Africa where historically, only members of the elite transitioned to university and from there took careers in various professional or civil service positions. The elite model emphasizes “selection” and is mediated through a high stakes leaving exam. Exams, selection mechanisms, and competition are valued as they are thought to ensure high standards of learning, rigor, and excellence. However, such features often promote a particular type of excellence, and if students and teachers do not receive adequate support to meet such standards, then exams and standards also produce high rates of failure, dropout, and push out.

At an individual level, a learners’ decision to follow the socially constructed “path” to university appears to make sense. One learner points out, “I’ve never seen a poor Ph.D.” (SS Learner 12). This may explain why all NSC learners sought to transition to university and nearly all NCV learners expressed a desire to continue their education beyond a level 4 qualification. However, the conceptualization of the path is a poor match to a reality where 50% of youth are unemployed, informal sector work accounts for nearly 25% of jobs, and formal sector jobs are becoming increasingly casualized. Government policy and the economy are simply not producing (or creating) jobs to which the majority of learners aspire in sufficient numbers. In South Africa, as increasing numbers of youth follow “the path” two of the things we have seen are qualification inflation and an increase in the number of unemployed graduates.

Coming out of this research, one of my concerns is the extent to which many interviewees’ construction of secondary education is shaped by the language of neoliberal discourse and the socially constructed path. Such constructions provide limited space for conceptualizing alternative and collective solutions to social problems. If individualized education is the solution, then collective support for policies designed to support income transfer (e.g., social grants and progressive taxation), reduce structural unemployment, income and wealth inequality, or protection of basic rights, shrinks. One reason for hope is that the majority of teachers and learners, especially NSC learners, spoke to priorities

which suggest a preference toward a more democratic model of secondary education. A democratized model would seek to shape secondary education so that it responds to the diverse needs and interests of society, communities, and all learners. A democratized model does not deemphasize the importance of academic rigor. Rather it suggests that there is sufficient time and space in school to help all learners meet a minimum academic standard, help individual learners discover and explore their varied interests, and respond to expressed interests and priorities in communities.

The elite path offers a narrow framework for understanding how youth currently are or could be involved in their communities. However, a democratic conceptualization would note that youth are also parents, volunteers, participants in a variety of social organizations (e.g., religious, political, sport, media, cultural, and counseling), and engage socially with other community members in a variety of ways. Many youth have family care responsibilities or income generation responsibilities; some have health issues, and others face challenges related to violence, abuse and criminality. In most middle-income countries, adult labor market participation is rarely above 75%. This means that a quarter of adult citizens participate in society in ways unrecognized by and unaccounted for in most economic data.

This chapter presents conclusions which can be drawn from the data and findings presented in Chapters 8-11. In the final chapter, I revisit the conceptual framework to reflect on how we can create a new construction of secondary education which better speaks to the holistic and humanistic priorities expressed by teachers and youth who were interviewed for this research. I also provide recommendations, proposals for a particular set of actions, based on my research findings.

Chapter 13: Toward a new vision for secondary education

In this chapter, I briefly revisit the conceptual framework. I do this in part to reflect on how the framework may contribute to the construction of and advocacy for a more holistic and humanistic secondary education. I conclude this chapter with some recommendations.

Revisiting the conceptual framework

As I went through the research process – that is, the process of conducting interviews, writing memos, creating and analyzing codes, identifying relationships between raw data and research questions, and writing up findings with reference to global discourses and literature on human development and political economy – I struggled with the question: will my research actually contribute to knowledge and practice in secondary education? In fact, I don't consider the implications outlined in the previous section especially revelatory in and of themselves. To me, they represent an alternative perspective on secondary education which closely follows constructivist, critical, and social justice perspectives. What I consider to be important contributions of this research is the extent to which the research conveys the perspectives and experiences of learners and teachers in marginalized communities (Chapters 8-12) and the extent to which I provide evidence that the varied interests and priorities of learners and teachers in marginalized communities are not represented in dominant discourses on and constructions of secondary education. Notably, these discourses and constructions often operate in opposition to the priorities, interests, and values of teachers and learners in marginalized communities. With this in mind, I decided to revisit the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1 and reflect on the extent to which it may be of use in changing how we think about the purpose of secondary education.

The conceptual framework offers a particular understanding of reality, identifies four elements associated with human development, and identifies two normative goals. In the framework I propose, reality is understood to be socially constructed and shaped by unequal power relations; and human development is understood to take place in a particular context, an ecological system shaped by direct and indirect influences. Human development can be seen as taking shape along four axes: expression of and growth in

values, self-knowledge, socially-valued knowledge and skills, and critical perspective and agency. Goals of human development include human well-being, the quality of a person's being (e.g., good-health and happiness) and ethical global development. Ethical global development sounds a bit grand, so if we desire a more modest goal, we can instead suggest that a goal for education is to contribute to ethical community development.

I consider this framework as a whole, with all parts dialectically related to one and other. Some elements and goals are left deliberately open so as to provide space for a process of democratic participation in specifying particular "values," socially-valued knowledge and skills," and "human development objectives." In line with the agency-focused capabilities approach, I argue that agency and democratic participation are integral components of well-being and ethical development. Put another way, human well-being and ethical development are, in part, defined by the extent to which one has a say in his or her own future and in the workings of society. This admonition suggests the importance of protecting the rights and ensuring the participation in society of historically disadvantaged and marginalized populations.

Before moving forward, a word of caution on the "capabilities" approach is needed. The capabilities approach speaks of human development in terms of "capabilities expansion" or, put another way, the unfolding of human potential. This unfolding offers the potential to promote human well-being. While the capabilities approach has gained currency in peer-reviewed education journals over the past decade, in some cases the concept of "capabilities" appears to be used as a substitute for "human capital." An author may suggest the need to develop "capabilities," however, if one reads the context in which capabilities is used and the rationale offered of the need to develop "capabilities" one could just as easily substitute "human capital." A recent initiative by Norrag on the development of "capabilities" in Argentina and South Africa appears to suffer from this conceptual confusion. In the framework that I offer, I don't use the concept, "capabilities," preferring instead to specify four elements of human development.

In the introductory chapter, I also introduce the concepts *aspiration-scape* and *agency-space*. I define the first concept, *aspiration-scape* as the extent of one's capability

to imagine varied and desired futures for one's self. The second concept, *agency-space* is the socially-constructed space in which an individual can realistically act to shape his or her own destiny. To me, the value of these terms lies in the extent to which they speak to two important concepts in human development, agency and aspiration; that they align with my perspective that reality is socially constructed and laden with unequal power; and that they identify that individual agency and aspiration are constructed along a structure-agency continuum. I draw on these two concepts to emphasize several issues which emerged in this research. In this research, one of the most important issues that emerged is the relationship between learners' agency-space and their aspiration-scape, or put another way, the relationship between a learners' "possibilities for present-action" and "richness and variety of potential futures which could be imagined" by learners.

How might these concepts be useful? Of FET colleges, Powell (2013) argues that "very few studies exist that consider the agency and perspective of college students and college staff and none that try to mediate between structure and agency in their analysis of the colleges" (p. 75). Similar critiques might be provided of academic secondary schools. Evidence from this research indicates that secondary schools often promote and enact narrow and oppressive constructions of education, privilege particular aspirations and, not only minimize the importance of learners' development of agency, but often operates in ways which diminish learners' development of agency.

The agency-space of NSC learners is constrained by the practice of learning areas and excessive testing, lack of exposure to different forms of knowledge and skill, lack of school safety, and issues of poverty or lack of parental support. NSC learners' aspiration-scapes are not only limited by their agency-space, but also by their ignorance of university and financial aid application processes, the absence of adult role models, mentors, or others who believe in them and limited self-knowledge. Learners' agency-space and aspiration-scape may be limited by their internalization of oppressive social structures: by experience of failure, lack of self-confidence, or poor development of foundational skills. Importantly, many NCV students speak convincingly of the expansion of their agency-space. This space is expanded because they have received a bursary, they have been given a second-chance to get a matric, and they have the opportunity to study in an area of interest to them. The aspiration-scape of NCV students

appears to have a narrower gaze than that of NSC learners: NCV learners are more focused on the role of education in helping them get a job in a particular occupational area. This suggests that learners may be more receptive to efforts to expand their aspiration-scape and agency-space at earlier stages in their development.⁹⁰

As noted earlier, many learners, when pressed, speak to education as playing a role in helping them follow their dreams. Learners' dreams reflect their personal interests and passions, change as they grow older or acquire more responsibilities, and are shaped by social structures and expectations. Education and schooling present learners with both existential space and instrumental milestones. This point is worth emphasizing:

Education and schooling can offer learners a safe and constructive place to explore their interests and develop their dreams. In modern society, the period of "youth" appears to be becoming a longer stage of life. How long, we may ask, will it take youth to find themselves? Perhaps it depends on how far we lead them astray and how long it takes for the pressures of adult-hood force youth to reconcile their dreams with their immediate needs. The existential space provided by education is being encroached upon by a neoliberal discourse based on the false premise that narrowly-conceived supply-side skills development will address economic growth and social inequalities. In South African policy dialogue, the values and priorities of human capital theory not only shape conceptualizations of "socially-valued skills and knowledge" but also tend to marginalize other elements in the normative framework I propose.

I argue that a new vision for secondary education must start with question proposed in the introduction: "What is our vision for the world we want?" and "What approaches to education and learning are most likely to help us create that world?" (CERT, 2013, p. 1). We could reframe the questions to ask, "what should a secondary school graduate know and be able to do?" "What is our understanding of an educated human being?" This understanding of education echoes the admonition shared by Spreen and Vally (2010a), that

⁹⁰ Powell (2013) suggests that future work on capabilities theorization, including understanding capabilities expansion as a dialectical and social process could draw on Dewey and Freire. We could add, in the South African context, we could also draw on the work of Neville Alexander and Steven Biko.

‘good policy’ should be measured by its relevance and applicability to those at whom it is aimed. Goals and aims need to be constructed from the grassroots up, embedded in the ideas, dreams and visions that school communities and learners themselves are empowered to articulate. (p. 445)

Individuals participating in this research argue that if we work to expand the agency-space or aspiration-scapes of learners in marginalized communities will not only expand the possibility for them to contribute to their own well-being, but also create new possibilities for them to contribute to ethical community development. In the words of the late Neville Alexander (2013), it is important for us,

to reflect on the first principles that motivate us in our struggle for a humane world order, one where every child and every person has more than an outside chance of fulfilling his or her human potential. Today, we have to formulate these principles in a new language, one that will find readier access among the youth, to whom, as we say so beautifully but so ineffectually, the future belongs. (p. 200-201)

Recommendations

To conclude, I offer five recommendations. These recommendations are based on my review and analysis of the research data, my post-research meetings with teachers and staff at the research sites, comments and critiques from my dissertation committee, my experience as a researcher on similar projects in South Africa and beyond (e.g., the Emerging Voices 2 project at CERT), and an extensive review of relevant literature and research. I believe these recommendations, if implemented, would significantly improve the quality and relevance of secondary education for all NSC learners and NCV students. For each recommendation, I have identified illustrative actions or activities in the appendix which practitioners and policy entrepreneurs could draw on to promote change.

Recommendation 1: Secondary education should be re-imagined to support holistic youth development. Given the central importance of this issue to my research questions, I have disaggregated this recommendation into eight sub-recommendations, outlined below.

- *Ensure learners are exposed to, and engage with, a wide range, and different levels of, knowledge and skills development experiences.* Nearly all interviewees argued that learners needed to be exposed to a wider array of knowledge and skills development experiences. This preference is echoed in the concern expressed by interviewees that learners specialize too early and schools focus too much on assessment. What does this mean in practice: schools should offer a greater variety of courses, learners should have more flexibility to choose courses, schools should be able to create new courses, and teachers should have more opportunities for and freedom to, experiment in the curriculum. Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) offers a useful framework for considering different levels of cognitive processes and dimensions of knowledge to which learners could be exposed.⁹¹ Other publications identify a range of non-cognitive skills (see Burnett & Jayaram, 2012) and technical skills which schools, communities, and further research may identify as contributing to holistic youth development.
- *Aggressively expand the variety of learning experiences offered to learners.* Youth are not built to sit, copy, and regurgitate notes for eight hours a day. There are a number of other ways to learn, including: practical and lab experience, project-based learning, community interviewing and community mapping, mentoring and job shadowing, having guest speakers, and going on field trips (e.g., to historical sites, businesses, places in nature, community projects, local government, local radio, or institutions of higher learning). Simply going out into the community to do activities connected to course content will reinforce the relevance of curriculum material to the lives of learners.
- *Make extracurricular activities an integral part of secondary school.* Student life can be significantly enriched by the presence of and individual participation in extra-curricular activities. Extracurricular activities could include clubs

⁹¹ The National Curriculum Statement, CAPS, and assessment guidelines often reference cognitive processes, but it is unclear the extent to which teachers refer to them in the classroom.

associated with sports and hobbies, cultural activities, the arts, and media.

Activities could also include small interest groups formed by groups of learners, such as a science and technology club, an entrepreneurship or innovation club, a girls' power club, or an agricultural technology club. Encouraging development of such clubs would also expand understandings of how education can contribute to human and community well-being.

- *Increase the priority given to learners' developing self-knowledge, agency, and critical perspective.* More than three-quarters of interviewees identified the importance of "learning about yourself." Self-knowledge was considered intrinsically important (i.e., learners want to know who they are and how other people see them), important to good social relations, and a necessary part in helping learners think about their future. Several instructors and learners suggested that the issue of self-knowledge spoke to learners' self-confidence and their inner lives. Activities related to self-knowledge helped learners think about what make them tick and why they find certain things important or valuable. Self-knowledge can also promote learners' development of agency.

This research indicates that schools often operate as oppressive and disempowering forces in the lives of many teachers and learners. The practices of banking and exam-focused education, lecturing instead of teaching, and the privileging of English language instruction diminish the agency of learners. Under this practice of schooling, there is limited space for self-directed learning or for learners to take responsibility for choosing the areas of knowledge and skill they wish to explore and develop. Importantly, in many interviews, learners express agency: taking control of their own learning path by studying at night, they serve on student council, and they do positive things in the community such as lead efforts to pick up litter. The dominant discourse does not identify learners as agents responsible for shaping their own development or environment; a re-imagined model of secondary education would.

Research findings also speak to the importance of developing the critical perspectives of teachers, learners, and other adults involved in education. Troublingly, many NSC learners identified critical thinking only with the subjects of mathematics and science and nearly half of NSC and NCV learners did not see their education as playing an important role in helping them explore and debate some of the complex issues facing South African society. Developing learners' critical perspectives requires exposing them to a critical pedagogy. A critical pedagogy would explicitly identify some of the main political and social struggles of our time and engage with them in the classroom. Education can play an important role in exposing learners to different perspectives and in facilitating dialogue and debate over them.

- *Be explicit in embedding education in values.* We should be more explicit in asking communities, parents, teachers, and learners questions related to values. We should ask learners: What is important to you? What do you want to do with your life? Why? What sort of community and world do you want to live in? Such a process would fundamentally challenge dominant epistemologies and pedagogies. Educational processes would foster dialogue and knowledge and be more explicitly related to learners' contexts and communities' priorities. Neville Alexander (2013) speaks to the importance of embedding education in values. He writes,

The Biko generation inculcated positive values of self-respect, self-esteem and self-consciousness into the young people at schools and at higher education institutions as well as older people in communities and in workplaces. They did so because they understood that the slave mentality is the proximate source of the sense of disempowerment, despair and political apathy that keeps the oppressed in thrall. (p.192)

How do we re-establish a culture of positive values, one that is socially critical but not destructive in its modalities? (p. 195)

Alexander (2013) identifies sufficiency as a major moral force in this new narrative, stating,

The psychological, pedagogical, ideological and emotional revolution implied by an approach that does not glorify individual or group

domination while allowing for the full development and flowering of the potential inherent in each and every human being can be imagined and extrapolated very easily. Individual brilliance expressed and deployed on behalf and for the benefit of democratically legitimated groups at different levels of society will continue to be one of the drivers of all social progress, including economic development. (p. 197-198)

While this research is not grounded in literature on social movements and communal efforts for social change, many interviewees appeared to identify with the struggles and values associated with past social movements in South Africa. For schools to support holistic youth development, they must facilitate discussions on social values.

- *Provide individualized, and broadly conceptualized, academic and career guidance to learners.* Data from this research, and extensive data from related research, point to the desire by students for much more information about, and time spent on, academic and career guidance. Academic and career guidance should not be narrowly focused on university access and formal sector jobs, but on the wide array of career, vocational, and livelihood opportunities to which the university and non-university-bound learners may aspire.
- *Reduce the influence of, and focus on, high-stakes tests.* The overwhelming emphasis DBE and schools place on NSC pass rates significantly diminishes the experience of secondary education for a large number of learners. What can be done? Perhaps little can be done at a systems-level: admission to university in South Africa is highly competitive and standardized assessments provide university admissions offices useful comparative data for screening applicants. However, there are also several examples of alternative practices: some universities and colleges don't ask for test scores; others make admissions decisions based on a wide range of criteria. In some classes, students may be assessed based on a portfolio of work, the completion of several practical exercises, or a final paper or project, as opposed to a year end exam. Individual

schools can nibble away at this challenge, but if we seek more fundamental change, it may need to come from the DBE.

- *Find other ways to make education and schooling enjoyable for learners (see Douse, 2013).*

I consider all of the above recommendations as inter-related and found within a human development approach which prioritizes social justice and transformation. Such an approach requires learners to define themselves (as opposed to allowing others to define them) and their priorities and have the self-confidence, tools, and consciousness necessary to critique society. One question which may come up in response to this recommendation is “How do we decide what knowledge, skills, and learning experiences should be promoted in school?” To answer this, I would return to the elements of human development (presented in chapter 1) and draw on the youth discourse presented in Chapter 2. “Socially-valued knowledge and skill” is presented as one of the elements of human development in the conceptual framework. The literature on youth offers several different ways of classifying socially-valued knowledge and skills. One way of thinking about socially-valued knowledge and skills is to consider “youth transitions” to adulthood. World Bank (2006) identifies five youth transitions: (i) to further learning, (ii) to work / vocation/ livelihoods, (iii) to forming families and adult relationships, (iv) to exercising citizenship, and (v) to adopting a healthy lifestyle. Drawing on this framework we can then ask: what education is needed for youth to successfully make these transitions? Communities may consider other types of knowledge and skill to be valuable as well. Such education may include financial education, political education, religious/spiritual education, computer / cell phone education, or education on women rights, services, and solidarity movements.

Recommendation 2: Secondary education should better respond to challenges facing disadvantaged learners. While it is unfair to expect schools to solve the problems of society, neither is it possible for educators to ignore the problems of communities in which schools are located, or the challenges learners bring into the

classroom. While the economic poverty of learners and the severely unequal distribution of resources are important issues, many interviewees also spoke of challenges which money alone (i.e. more bursaries) cannot solve. Provision of additional social services and learning experiences through the school can help schools in marginalized communities play a role in better responding to learners' lived realities. I elaborate with five sub-recommendations.

- *Improve school safety and security.* As noted in the introduction and in findings chapters, learners and students live in one of the most violent and sexually violent countries in the world. Learners in communities with high levels of crime, violence, abuse, and other social ills need safe spaces. School should be one of those. In several communities, schools are experimenting with extended school hours.
- *Provide wrap around services for vulnerable students.* Many students come from poor and vulnerable households or from households where there is not a responsible parent or guardian. Schools can serve as places of support for these students by offering nutrition, counseling, and support services, or by helping students locate social services (e.g., water and electricity). While teachers help fill this gap at present, they can't do it alone.
- *Provide remedial learning support to students who are behind.* The NCV focuses on strengthening students' foundational skills. High schools should provide remedial and targeted instruction for students who are struggling to acquire foundational skills. Such instruction may help reduce dropout as well as reduce the number of learners requiring remedial support in TVET colleges.
- *Acknowledge the influence of community disruptions on the lives of learners.* Strikes, protests, and service delivery problems affect communities and learners. DBE, schools, and teachers must be mindful of how these issues affect their mission and develop creative solutions.

- *Improve the accessibility and quality of “second-chance” NSC programs.* The NCV appears to be the second-chance program of choice, in part because of the availability of the bursary, and in part because of the low-quality and inaccessibility of second-chance NSC programs offered through ABET centers.

Recommendation 3: Consider transitioning toward a comprehensive model of secondary education that supports quality for all. Findings in my literature review and in this research point to (i) high levels of secondary school dropout, (ii) the low levels of foundational skill and cognitive skills development in basic and secondary schools in South Africa, (iii) that the need for a “second-chance” reflects, in part, the narrow construction of secondary education and the influence of “NSC exam pressure,” (iv) that most learners desire a more diversified secondary education, (v) that, compared to older learners, younger learners are more open to, and have more time for, holistic learning experiences, and (vi) that most learners desire additional education, and specialization, beyond a level 4 (an NSC or NCV) qualification. I draw on these issues to suggest that, in addition to considering the above two recommendations, that policy-makers also consider transitioning toward a comprehensive, as opposed to maintaining a specialization, model of secondary education. Such a model may better meet the interests and desires of multiple stakeholders, and do a better job of providing secondary education “for all” learners.

I emphasize this recommendation because I come from the perspective that, of late, the priority of tertiary expansion has overshadowed the need to strengthen and change secondary schools. Why do I emphasize the importance of secondary schools? Because high quality secondary education can also contribute to national goals of promoting equity and social justice; because younger learners have fewer adult responsibilities and are generally more open to varied learning experiences and holistic development; because, for struggling learners to succeed in life, earlier interventions are generally more effective; and because, even with rapid tertiary expansion, over the next generation, the majority of secondary school learners in South Africa are not likely to transition to tertiary education – this means that we need to make secondary education more useful for these learners. *One facet of reforming secondary education should*

*include re-thinking the financing of secondary schools and consideration of an adequacy standard of equity (see Monk, 1990 for discussion on an adequacy approach to education finance).*⁹²

Recommendation 4: Re-vitalize TVET colleges and the NCV with an orientation toward improved quality. TVET colleges, vocational education, and working class jobs continue to be stigmatized in South Africa. However, this historical and popular stigma should not be cause for despair or inaction. For TVET colleges and the NCV programs to become respected and valued in South Africa, their work and mission must be revitalized. It is important to note that despite the negative press and stigma associated with the TVET colleges and the NCV program, enrolment in the NCV program at a national level has realized significant growth over the past four years. The NCV offers a popular alternative to the NSC, a second-chance for many learners, and a potentially valuable qualification, which, with improved articulation, will support transition of many students to further education and learning. While at present, the NCV may not lead many learners directly into the workforce, several countries, among them Switzerland, Germany, and Singapore, provide examples of college and training systems which offer high quality vocational education linked to available work opportunities. TVET Colleges could work toward this aspiration.

How could this revitalization happen? Such revitalization includes implementing some of the recommendations outlined in the White Paper (DHET, 2014) such as improving the capacity of lecturers and providing sufficient resources to schools. I offer four additional recommendations.

- *Strengthen TVET college ties with, and to be vehicles for change in, their communities.* TVET colleges should integrate the priorities and needs of the

⁹² In *Educational finance: An economic approach* (1990), Monk provides detailed discussion on different definitions of equity in education. Equity has many interpretations, including equal treatment of equals (e.g. equal inputs) and unequal treatment of unequals (e.g. providing additional support to disadvantaged populations or support to gifted and talented children), among them. Recent discourse on equity in education argues for an “adequacy” approach. An adequacy approach specifies that there be sufficient resources and support to ensure students an effective opportunity to acquire specified knowledge and skills. Adequacy analysis can link outcomes among different populations with resources required to meet those outcomes. For example, learners in a non-dominant mother tongue or in a rural area may require more resources to become proficient in English.

communities in which they are located into their mission. TVET colleges should strengthen engagement with local government, business, and other community institutions to identify and seek to make progress toward local development objectives. Secondary schools, through their PTAs and SMA, should follow this recommendation as well.

- *Create Centers for Local Economic Development (LED) and Local Community Development (LCD) at each TVET college.* TVET colleges offer critical resources and capacities (e.g., broad-based knowledge, analytical skills, and energetic and learning-oriented students) which could be used to conduct research, provide analysis, and develop and test ideas designed toward local community and economic development objectives. Placing such a center at each of 50 TVET colleges would be the equivalent of establishing 50 localized economic and social development incubators – many of them in marginalized communities. These centers could play an important role in providing information and developing relationships which could support progress toward local social development goals.
- *Revitalize TVET college work placement and workplace training initiatives.* TVET colleges do not have the financial and human resources to complete their missions alone. To be blunt, workplace experience cannot be simulated in the classroom. In addition, in several occupational areas, training on advanced equipment may require that TVET colleges send students to industry sites. This is not a new suggestion; however, DHET (2014) is clear that the activities of the SETAs and National Skills Fund have not supported sufficient progress toward these objectives (work placement and workplace training of TVET college students). A revitalized effort may require engagement of unions, businesses, and local government. While the relationship between unions, corporations, and government have been negative and recriminatory of late, it is hard to imagine an effective education and training system not built on some collective agreement between capital and labor and mediated through government.

- *Consider a comprehensive secondary model which includes offering the NCV, or something like it.* DBE is already considering implementing the NCV at technical secondary schools. This recommendation may be easier to implement in high-enrollment urban schools or schools which partner with local FET colleges to allow for cross-enrollment of students in different courses.

Recommendation 5: Improve professional development for, and strengthen professionalization of teachers, lecturers, and school leadership. Teachers and lecturers can play a critical role in the education and development of youth. While matters of pedagogy and teacher subject-matter knowledge are important (and, as suggested in this research, should be strengthened) research findings also suggest that teachers can play important roles in providing guidance and mentoring to learners and in providing counseling and support to learners with few other adult role models. Teachers can also serve as examples of adults who have attained a “bright future” and as adults demonstrating ethical and professional conduct in the community. Notably, interviewees participating in this study (including teachers and lecturers) are not shy about critiquing some teachers. On teachers, the dominant discourse is schizophrenic: teachers are the most important in-school factor influencing student learning outcomes. However, teachers are also seen as lazy, unmotivated, “ill-disciplined” constituents in a dysfunctional civil service (Taylor 2011, p. 18).⁹³ Contrary to discourse, learners appear to offer a more balanced and holistic view of teachers: learners recognize good teachers (in terms of subject matter knowledge, pedagogy, and commitment) and they want more of them. Many learners also identify and value the guidance, counseling, motivation, and support roles which teachers play. Teachers and other adults interviewed want to rid the system of unmotivated and poor performing teachers while also acknowledging that many teachers were provided inferior education (under Bantu education) and thus would benefit from professional development. Four specific recommendations follow.

⁹³ Taylor (2011) argues that “the central problematic of South Africa’s dysfunctional school system is a dysfunctional civil service. ...the system as a whole is sluggish, ill-disciplined and lacking initiative” (p. 18).

- *Provide professional development for teachers and lecturers*, on a demand-driven basis, on subject-matter knowledge, pedagogy, instructional design, and assessment so that all teachers have the knowledge and tools to practice more diverse and effective teaching and assessment methods. NSC students were highly critical of teacher-centred, chalk-and-talk instruction and the poor use of instructional time.
- *Provide ongoing professional development (e.g., short, certificate, diploma, and degree courses) and support (e.g., induction, mentoring, and coaching programs) for all principals and especially for new school principals.* This recommendation includes support for heads of TVET colleges.
- *Take action to promote teachers' and lecturers' adherence to professional codes of conduct.* Many teachers and students identified teacher absenteeism, lack of teacher preparedness, and some teachers' disrespectful attitude toward students as important issues. Each of these problems contravenes the professional code of conduct for secondary school teachers. Providing actors at district, sub-district, and school levels with better tools and resources to manage teacher code of conduct breaches could play an important role in developing an increasingly professionalized teaching corps.
- *Revisit "conditions of service" concerns expressed by teachers and lecturers.* Many teachers and lecturers feel undervalued and un-supported by DBE, DHET, school management, and communities. Research into teacher and lecturer conditions of service could identify possible changes which, if implemented, could improve teacher effectiveness and morale, as well as attract new teachers.

While it is important to emphasize that my research findings are based on a small-scale qualitative study of two schools in townships in Gauteng, my analysis of data and the above recommendations draw on a broad body of international and South African research. Notably, many schools and colleges (e.g., ex-Model C schools in South Africa,

high performing TVET schools in other countries, and high performing schools in depressed urban areas in the United States) are already implementing many of the above recommendations. Admittedly, many of these recommendations are not ground-breaking: who, exactly, is for “unsafe” schools, education without values, or a TVET college with a poor record of providing work experience? I offer these particular recommendations, however, because according to this research, these are the issues which call out for attention.

Of course, given the diverse contexts in which schools operate, I hope that schools and communities can draw on the above recommendations to articulate their own vision for holistic youth development. For convenience, I summarize recommendations in the textbox on the next page. For each recommendation, I provide a table of illustrative actions and activities in a separate appendix. I hope that practitioners and policy entrepreneurs could draw on some of these ideas to drive change.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Secondary education should be re-imagined to support holistic youth development.

- Ensure learners are exposed to, and engage with, a wide range of knowledge and skills development experiences.
- Aggressively expand the variety of learning experiences offered to learners.
- Make extracurricular activities an integral part of secondary school.
- Increase the priority given to learners' developing self-knowledge, agency, and critical perspective.
- Be explicit in embedding education in values.
- Provide individualized, and broadly conceptualized, academic and career guidance to learners.
- Reduce the influence of, and focus on, high-stakes tests.
- Find other ways to make education and schooling enjoyable for learners.

Recommendation 2: Secondary education should better respond to challenges facing disadvantaged learners.

- Improve school safety and security.
- Provide wrap around services for vulnerable students.
- Provide remedial learning support to students who are behind.
- Acknowledge the influence of community disruptions on the lives of learners.
- Improve the accessibility and quality of "second-chance" NSC programs.

Recommendation 3: Consider transitioning toward a comprehensive model of secondary education that supports quality for all.

- Consider introducing an adequacy-based model for education finance.

Recommendation 4: Re-energize TVET colleges and the NCV with an orientation toward improved quality.

- Strengthen TVET college ties with, and to be vehicles for change in, their communities.
- Create Centers for Local Economic Development and Local Community Development at each TVET College.
- Revitalize TVET college work placement and workplace training initiatives.
- Consider a comprehensive secondary model which includes offering the NCV, or something like it.

Recommendation 5: Improve professional development for, and strengthen professionalization of teachers, lecturers, and school leadership.

- Provide professional development for teachers and lecturers.
- Provide ongoing professional development and support for all principals and especially for new school principals.
- Take action to promote teachers' and lecturers' adherence to professional codes of conduct.
- Revisit "conditions of service" concerns expressed by teachers and lecturers.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Putting recommendations into practice: suggestions for practitioners and policy entrepreneurs

Recommendations	Practical ideas
Recommendation 1: Secondary education should be re-imagined to support holistic youth development	
<i>Relevant to all recommendations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce school planning that involves the parents and community institutions and is organized around positive youth development • Identify characteristics or expectations of secondary school graduates. Think about what “characteristics” every youth should have as well as what freedom youth should have to explore their individual and unique potentials. <p><i>For example, perhaps the community will identify the ideal secondary school graduate as having a certain number of characteristics, which may include some values, some general knowledge, some specific knowledge, some cognitive skills, some non-cognitive skills, some technical skills, some citizenship characteristics, some healthy living practices, some exposure to the arts, and some service / learning experience in the local community.⁹⁴</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note: A lot of this work is about changing mindsets and expectations of secondary education in the community.

⁹⁴ The existing Life Orientation curriculum offers content related to many of these issues.

<p><i>Ensure learners are exposed to, and engage with, a wide range of knowledge and skills development experiences</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize teachers with conceptual tools to think about holistic youth development. This may include familiarizing teachers with Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy, a rubric of “non-cognitive” and other types of skills, and familiarization with NSC and NCV subjects they do not know about.⁹⁵ • Abolish learning areas and allow students more freedom to choose their own classes. • Encourage (and provide tools for) teacher creativity within the existing curriculum. • Develop or provide courses which students want, for example, Computer Application Technology and courses which non-university bound students would value. • Create “freedom to fail” activities to encourage students to try new things. • Offer skills development experiences, even if not related to a specific NSC course.
<p><i>Aggressively expand the variety of learning experiences offered to learners</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize teachers (and help them practice) the facilitation of different types of learning experiences. Such experiences may include: practical and lab experience, project-based learning, community interviewing and community mapping, mentoring and job shadowing, having guest speakers, and going on field trips (e.g., to historical sites, businesses, nature areas, community projects, local government, local radio, or institutions of higher learning). • Provide budget for these experiences and ensure the inclusion of learners from poor households.
<p><i>Make extracurricular activities an integral part of secondary school</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement extra-curricular activities and student clubs and provide budget for them. • Facilitate inter-mural and intramural school activities, invite the community. • Partner with local organizations to support these endeavors.

⁹⁵ The National Curriculum Statement, CAPS, and assessment guidelines often reference cognitive processes, but it is unclear the extent to which teachers refer to them in the classroom.

<i>Increase the priority given to learners' developing self-knowledge, agency, and critical perspective</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-knowledge: Introduce practices such as journaling, peer/teacher feedback, reflective learning, service learning, student self-assessment, or Myers-Briggs and career assessment activities. Link these activities with academic and career guidance. • Agency: Provide opportunities for student assumption of responsibility and leadership (e.g., student council, class prefects, extracurricular activities, special events, etc.) at school and in the community. • Critical perspective: Introduce practices of critical pedagogy into the classroom or the life of the school (e.g., problem posing), associate them with hot button issues (e.g., domestic violence, same-sex marriage, racism). Host debates, essay contests, or poetry / art contests on these issues. • Re-introduce political education / civics for all students. Consider school-led service learning days or activities.
<i>Be explicit in embedding education in values</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be explicit in associating the life of the school and the pursuit of learning with specific values. • Reinforce these values in classroom practices. • Promote day, events, contests, and initiatives which highlight issues related to diversity and inclusion.
<i>Provide individualized, and broadly conceptualized, academic and career guidance to learners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and fund a position which supports this objective in every school. • Provide relevant resources on academic and career guidance to every learner, prioritizing those in marginalized schools. Ensure materials provide resources relevant and accessible to (i.e. language) to non-college bound learners.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how to best integrate this into the life of the school (e.g., spend more time on this issue in Life Orientation).
<i>Reduce the influence of, and focus on, high-stakes tests</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase emphasis on other types of education related to holistic development. Introduce other types of assessment, including formative assessment, learning portfolios, practical exercises, final papers or projects, etc. Identify opportunities for learners who may struggle to pass the NSC.
<i>Find other ways to make education and schooling enjoyable for learners</i>	
Recommendation 2: Secondary education should better respond to challenges facing disadvantaged learners	
<i>Improve school safety and security</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the major safety and security issues. Work with appropriate social services, if necessary. Extend school hours to create a safe space for students.
<i>Provide wrap-around services for vulnerable students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a position to connect youth to social services.
<i>Provide remedial learning support to students who are behind</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify students in need of remedial learning support and provide it (tutoring and peer tutoring)
<i>Acknowledge the influence of community disruptions on the lives of learners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build extra school days into the school calendar to account for lost days Offer counseling for students affected by community disruption Have school-wide dialogues on these issues.
<i>Improve the accessibility and quality of “second-chance” NSC programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the school level: provide after-school tutoring for individuals wanting to re-take the NSC.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the national-level: provide better funding to this initiative to support implementation through ABET, or other youth development centers.
Recommendation 3: Fix secondary education before rapidly expanding access to tertiary education. Transition toward a comprehensive model of secondary education.	
<i>Transition toward a comprehensive model of secondary education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider recommendation 1 suggestions Offer an NCV, or NCV-like set of courses, to be implemented in secondary schools. Develop partnerships with local schools and colleges to provide opportunities for students with different interests.
<i>Transition toward an “adequacy” standard of financing equity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research on the financial equity between secondary schools. Conduct an analysis of the implications of transitioning toward an adequacy standard of equity at a system level.
Recommendation 4: Re-energize TVET colleges and the NCV with an orientation toward improved quality	
<i>Strengthen TVET college ties with, and to be vehicles for change in, their communities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TVET colleges should create administrative structures, or working groups, to be able to regularly liaise with representatives in the local community (e.g., local government, business, community organizations, labor representatives) and discuss issues of common interest. TVET colleges should re-invigorate their outreach efforts to youth.
<i>Create Centers for Local Economic Development and Local Community Development at each TVET College</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create LED and LCD centers with a mandate to research and support local economic and local community development initiatives. Cross-cut the activities of these centers with student coursework and student life.

<i>Revitalize TVET college work placement and workplace training initiatives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw on the efforts of the previous two sub-recommendations to support this recommendation. • Provide dedicated staff to tend to this objective.
Recommendation 5: Improve professional development for, and strengthen professionalization of teachers, lecturers, and school leadership.	
<i>Provide professional development for teachers and lecturers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide demand-driven professional development support related to Recommendation 1. • Support instructional leadership capacity of heads of departments and school leadership.
<i>Provide ongoing professional development and support for all principals and especially for new school principals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide demand-driven professional development support related to Recommendation 1. • Provide certificate, diploma and degree courses for school leadership as well as district supported induction for new principles.
<i>Take action to promote teachers' and lecturers' adherence to professional codes of conduct</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all community stakeholder know the teachers' professional code of conduct • Ensure school leadership is aware of the regulations surrounding the management, support, and disciplining of teachers.
<i>Revisit "conditions of service" concerns expressed by teachers and lecturers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct mixed-methods research on teacher conditions of service. Include research on attraction and retention of new teachers.

Appendix 2: Interview protocols

Protocol: Semi-structured interview

SS Learners

[SIMPLIFIED FORM]

1. Can you tell me about your background? Where from? Family? Etc.
2. Can you tell me about your educational background? how long have you been at this school?
3. Can you tell me about what you do at school: What classes are you taking? Are you involved in other activities?
4. Do you enjoy school? Is it fun?
5. What do you think is the purpose of SS?
 - a. What is the purpose?
 - b. Card sort: what do you think is important? What is emphasized at the school?
6. Some people say education should help you to become a good adult. Is there a role for FETCs in helping you become a good adult?
 - a. What does it mean to be a good adult?
 - b. Should there be a focus on community, diversity, democracy?
 - c. What about youth who drop out? What is the problem? What does SS do for them?
7. Some people say SS is too narrow. Taking too few subject. Or learning in only a small number of areas. What do you think?
 - a. Is the focus on exams a problem? Does it take away from other things?
8. Some people put a lot of pressure on education: they want it to address poverty, unemployment and inequality? Can it do that?
9. Jobs. What do you need to be successful in the world of work?
 - a. Open ended, Card sort, Can SS address this?
10. Are there things you want to learn, but you can't here?
11. Three points to make to Angie to improve SSs
12. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Protocol: Semi-structured interview

FET Learners

[SIMPLIFIED FORM]

1. Can you tell me about your background? Where from? Family? Etc.
2. Can you tell me about your educational background?
3. Can you tell me about what you do at school: Occupational track, classes, activities.
4. Do you enjoy school? Is it fun?
 - a. Are there things you'd like to learn or do that you can't at school?
5. Why did you decide to study here? Why the NCV? Why not a technical SS?
6. What do you think is the purpose of the NCV?
 - a. What is the purpose?
 - b. Is the purpose of the NCV different than secondary school?
 - c. Card sort (what do they focus on? What should they focus on?)
 - i. [exposure to different things, skills for jobs, values, freedom to fail]
7. Some people say education should help you to become a good adult. Is there a role for FETCs in helping you become a good adult?
 - a. Should there be a focus on community, diversity, democracy?
 - b. Is the focus on exams a problem? Does it take away from other things?
8. DHET white paper says, FETCs are to provide training on knowledge, skills and attitudes for "employment in the labour market." What do you think?
 - a. Can FETC education address jobs, poverty, inequality, unemployment?
9. NCV as a second chance. What about for youth who are struggling? Dropout, fail matric, etc.
10. Jobs. Transferrable skills needed.
 - a. Open ended
 - b. Card sort
 - c. Can FETCs address?
11. Three points to make to Blade to improve FETCs
12. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Protocol: Semi-structured interview

SS Teachers

[SIMPLIFIED FORM]

1. Can you tell me about your work at this school: How long have you been at this school? What classes do you teach? What activities are you involved in?
2. Learners come to SS from different backgrounds and experiences. Tell me about your learners: their homes, their educational backgrounds.
3. Tell me a bit about working here. What do you enjoy? What is a challenge?
4. What do you think is the purpose of SS?
 - a. What is the purpose?
 - b. Card sort: what do you think is important? What is emphasized at the school?
5. Some people say education should help you to become a good adult. Is there a role for FETCs in helping you become a good adult?
 - a. What does it mean to be a good adult?
 - b. Should there be a focus on community, diversity, democracy?
 - c. What about youth who drop out? What is the problem? What does SS do for them?
6. Some people say SS is too narrow. Taking too few subject. Or learning in only a small number of areas. What do you think?
 - a. Is the focus on exams a problem? Does it take away from other things?
7. Some people put a lot of pressure on education: they want it to address poverty, unemployment and inequality? Can it do that?
8. Let's get more specific to this community....Can SS help address the challenges of this community? What are the main challenges? What can SS do?
9. Jobs. What do you need to be successful in the world of work?
 - a. Open ended, Card sort, Can SS address these?
10. Are there things you want to do to change or improve things? What? What are the struggles?
11. Three points to make to Angie to improve SSs
12. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

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